

WRESTLING FLYER INTERVIEW COLLECTION #2

PO BOX 283, WALLINGFORD, PA 19086

NEWSLETTER-\$6 FOR 4 ISSUES

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INTERVIEW STEVE KEIRN

The following interview with Steve Keirn, 42, was published in issues #34 and #35 and was conducted via telephone from his hometown of Tampa, Florida on September 21, just several weeks after he was released from the WWF after turning down their offer to him of a front-office position in Stamford, as they felt they had gone as far as they could go with Skinner and Doink II.

John Clark: Why and how did you get involved in the professional wrestling and what prior training did you have for it?

Steve Keirn: Oh God, you're going to go way back, huh? Trying to cut the story down so we don't just drag out here. My dad was a POW (Prisoner of War) and at the same time I was growing here in Tampa. Mike Graham and I were in school together. And I think out of respect, Eddie Graham started offering, saying, "Hey, bring Steve along when we're going to do something like go fishing or hunting. So I really started looking up to Eddie. The idea was he was trying to help me out with the absence of my dad, and he didn't really have any motivation for it. There's nothing I could give him. I just thought all the guys that I always met were really nice. So I said if I ever had an opportunity to be around people like this when I was working and I grew up. It was just that simple. It seemed like I'd want to be friends with these kind of people. Anyway, I went to college and my major was pre-med, but my education wasn't strong enough to support it. I just got lost into the college thing and it was like I wasn't really into what I was doing. I didn't have the dedication to become a doctor. The original thought even before a doctor was just out and out--money. At seventeen years old and somebody says, "Well, what do you want to be going to college?" Well s--t, I want to be a doctor or a lawyer or the President. I don't want to go to college to be some jerbronic. I had no idea, but I said, "Well, give me doctor." Then I realized how difficult it was going to be, so I lost a lot of interest in school. At the same time I had a sister at home--that was all that was home with my mother--she moved away and got married. I needed to go back because my mother was alone. I came back to Florida, and at that time Eddie noticed that I had been into power-lifting in college. And I had gone from a high school kid as 165 lbs up to about 255. I was competing in college in power-lifting and had done real well. I worked for Eddie through the years as a counselor at his youth camps for boys where we taught wrestling and archery and just summer camp stuff. I got really involved into wrestling and then Mike and I wrestled all the time. We coached John Heath in Sarasota and was always involved with the training. All the wrestlers were second generation wrestlers so if the guys had sons, he'd help them train them. So then Eddie suggested to me, when I'd lost interest in school and came home, he said, "If you'd like, maybe Matsuda and some of the guys could start working out with you and you can see if you'd like to be a wrestler. Guys were coming and doing things like Dory Funk Jr. when he was a world champion. He'd come through and he'd call me and he'd say, "Let's go down to the Sportatorium for about an hour. I mean, I was honored like, "This guy's the world's champion. And he's no relation to me. He has no real obligation to me. He just says, 'Come on and work out with me.'" I worked out with him and Jack Brisco, who I idolized, and Jerry Brisco's the same way. And then Mike spent a lot of time with me. It was like, people were putting a lot of effort into me for no money. I wasn't paying them to teach me. It was like they had taken an interest in me and they realized that I really wanted to do it bad, so they spent quite a while with me. I just basically got broken in down here. And I can't give credit to just one person because there was so many involved and so many gave me different pieces of advice. Like Dory Funk Jr., he would give me his theory about why he wrestled like he did and why he thought it was a good thing. He would say, "You have to develop your own style. And what you do is you take and you watch the guys that you watch work and you enjoy, you take a little bit from each one. And then pretty soon you have your own style. That's kind of how I got started into it.

Clark: Was it tough for you and everybody else trying to make a living in the business when you started out in Tampa?

Keirn: At that time it was like the early '70s and there was a couple situations that made it tough. We had a gas shortage there for a while. That was one of the tough times in the wrestling business, when we'd have to drive from these towns and they wouldn't sell gas to you after dark. So before you made it to the matches you had to go fillup somewhere and get in a line. And then it's like, the money wasn't that good because you're minimum guarantees on some of it were like \$40 in most territories. Everything gets more and more expensive every year, but jobs don't seem to go up for value that much, comparatively to them. I can remember the biggest check I got for the first three years of the wrestling business was like \$700. I had already gone to the Carolinas and I was Tiger Conway Jr.'s partner, working for the Crocketts. George Scott had given me kind of my first break and gave me a little bit of a push there. I started making in the \$700 range. And before that, for the first couple of years in the wrestling business, my highest check was like \$310. That was like six days work, you know, driving in a car and everything. But at that time I didn't have a family and wasn't married. I was living in an apartment just tickled to death to be a wrestler. It's the excitement, the thrill. It's a real challenge because people don't understand it until they've experienced it. I try to tell guys when I'm teaching them to wrestle, I say, "Hey, now, seeing it on TV, imagining yourself doing it, nothing

compares to walking out and walking down that aisle then getting up in the ring and realizing you're in there, in maybe something much like your underwear! And you're right in the center of attention and everybody's focused in on you, especially at the beginning. Then, boom, you're realizing, "Hey, where the hell am I? I shouldn't be up here." That's a real scary feeling, to see it on guys faces, now that you are doing it.

Clark: When did that great, great feeling of being a professional wrestler wear off for you?

Keirn: I'd like to say that I could really pinpoint a time when it wore off, but I can't honestly say that it's ever wore off. Because I'll go out there and maybe the fear of not knowing what I'm doing is gone, but the other fear of being caught in a situation that catches you totally by surprise and you don't have an out for it at that given point. Being tested to that ability. What I'm saying is, you're in there and everything is going fine and then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, the guy drops dead on you or something. And you're thinking, "Now, what do I do? He was supposed to beat me. Do I just pull him over on top of me and drop dead under him?" That's a hypothetical situation. There's no time. I mean, I still have doubts about things when you go to the ring. People say, "Well, you've been doing this so long and you've done it in front of millions of people." When you count over a twenty year span and from the countries like Japan on big shows to the countries like the United States on big shows and pay-per-views, you start thinking how many people you've actually performed in front of. With the televisions and all that combined, you go, "Wow, I shouldn't be nervous." But then somebody could say, "Hey, well, you're going to be on a show where it may not be that large a crowd." And you go there, and you go, "Well, that won't be bad." And then they say, "Well, the guy you're working with's only had two matches." And then you go, "Oh, my God," so you start panicking again. Just different feelings.

Clark: But do you think it's a lot tougher today for the professional wrestlers starting out in the business these days?

Keirn: Yeah, you know why? I think that I'd have to say that it's no tougher physically demanding than it was before. It's just tougher now to handle an audience. I mean, audiences are so well educated. They've seen so much. It's like action movies. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, whoever it is, has to keep out-doing themselves to get people to pay to see them. And they're spoiling the public to the point of no return. So what do you give them in the wrestling business that keeps over-doing it and out-doing itself? I mean, you're just going to come to a point in time where they're going to say, "Well, I'm satisfied with what I'm seeing," or "You can't satisfy me anymore and I'm no longer interested." I can't predict the future. People have been telling me the wrestling business is going to be dead for the last fifteen years. I mean, I can honestly say that. Then they'd give me excuses in territories of like, "Oh well, school's started, and the territory's going to drop off." "Oh, it's Christmas, and the territory's going to drop off." I could be working in Florida and their usual thing was Christmas and school time was bad. Summer times were excellent. Then you'd go to work for the AWA for Verne Gagne, and it's like the opposite. All of a sudden, your territory is a winner territory where when school starts, people start buying tickets. And at Christmas, that's a big deal to be at the wrestling matches. Minneapolis is a big bucks territory in the winter. Summer time, they're dead. So you go through a lot of experiences. But as for it being tougher so far as overall, I'd say that it's equivalent. It's just a little more difficult because right now guys don't have the opportunity to get experience around the country like they used to. Where do they learn to work seven days a week, they used to work? Atlanta used to work seven days a week. They'd work three shots on Saturday and sometimes two on Sunday. That was a heavy schedule. At one time, you had a TV on either a Wednesday or a Tuesday in Macon, then you had the two TVs on Saturday, which was Atlanta's early morning taping, then the afternoon live show in Columbus, and then a night in either Griffin or Carrollton. So you put down some wrestling matches in one week. I'll ask a guy now, at a television or something, "Well, how long have you been working?" They'll say, "Three years." And then I'll say, "Well, how many matches have you had?" They'll say, "Two." It's a weird combination. Years ago when you said you were working for three years, then you've been working full-time three years. It doesn't matter where you were at. All the territories were basically full-time operations. So the guys aren't getting the experience before they come to bat. In other words, you put them on a cable network where they're really under the gun, and if they don't have the experience, it's not really their fault. And they can't pass up the opportunity. They have to go for it when they get it. They can't say, "Oh, well, don't take me. I'm not ready." It is difficult. It's tough, but it's impossible.

Clark: Do you feel that the Rock & Roll Express or the Rockers were ever able to follow up in your footsteps to the same height of popularity that the Fabulous Ones achieved?

Keirn: Well, I can't answer for other places they were at because I wasn't there with the character and the gimmick at the same time. I can say that for the areas that we dealt with, which was in the Tennessee area mainly and then up in the AWA, that they couldn't have come in right after us and then not be looked down upon or as an

imitation of. But when they went out and preceded us like the Fantastics. They were almost carbon copy, only the two guys were just a little bit smaller than us. Not that big a difference, that anybody should be offended. They were a little bit less experienced. And so they went to Bill Watts and they duplicated the videos that really made the characters get over and just put themselves in it. And so nobody in that area had seen us because there was no overlaps in those days of the cable networking. So they didn't really know there was another team that they were imitating, except for probably really hard wrestling fans. What they saw they accepted, they liked it, and it got over too. Even though the Fantastics were a duplication, they got over just as well in another territory as we did in the AWA because it was a good gimmick. But the Rockers came along later in life, but they came along and they basically were pointed a finger at for portraying the Rock & Roll Express, I think. You know, I think that the Rock & Roll Express had already established their team on Ted Turner's network. And then when the Rockers came out, they had been in Verne Gagne's territory, but they had basically imitated them to a point to where it wasn't even a Fabulous One comparable there. The comparable team in Tennessee; when the team of the Rock & Roll Express was put together after the Fabulous Ones, and the people looked at them as a little bit more of a teeny bopper and us as a little bit more mature—but still not like the greatest, but just a little bit more radical. We were like a cross between some guys that had the ability but then they really got wild. I mean Tennessee was a wild place in those days. I'll give you an example, the Beverly Brothers, both of them were interested in the Fabulous Ones because they were in Minnesota and they had seen a little bit of it. They got the tapes and watched some of the old films and they saw Moondogs and Shepherders stuff, and they fights all the way back to the Memphis Coliseum, and tearing up boards, and tearing up the announcer's tables, just wild s—t. They're going, "Wow." That's just like anything else. Every place in the United States or the world in wrestling has a little bit different style. And you have to adapt to their style. You can't get everybody else to adapt to yours.

Clark: What do you think the main reasons were for the Fabulous Ones becoming one of the most popular tag teams of their time and drawing big money?

Keirn: I think it was because that it was just like anything else, it has a certain amount of luck, it has the timing. There was nothing really basically taking everybody's attention. That it came out at the right time. A lot of the success I contribute in that area to Jackie Fargo. He was an older wrestler that came and paved the way with the Fargos and his style. And just being a great wrestler. Maybe he wasn't the most scientific, but he adapted to whatever area he was in and he made money, he made people remember him, he had a lot of fans, he was a great bad guy and he was a great good guy. It got to the point where all of his fans that he had in that area came to us because he endorsed us. He gave us the Fabulous One title thing from the Fabulous Fargos. So we picked up so many people at that point. It's a great way to do business for babyfaces. And people in the wrestling business aren't even intelligent enough to see that now. I think that was one of the reasons why people are interested in me doing jobs and things for their offices, is because that I can see things with a different light, where sometimes if they've looked at it so long, it's gotten dim and stale. I never think that babyface interviews were easy to do. But the one thing I always thought was if you really wanted to get a guy over as a babyface, you let other people talk about him a little bit. That's what Jackie Fargo did about us. He told the people on television, "These are my boys. I like these guys. These guys will be good to." And all of this. It's not us saying, "Yeah, well, we're going to give you a hundred percent." It's a line of bulls—t people have heard for so long. So here it is, a guy that they've liked, respected, and watched for years, saying, "Like these f—ckin' guys!" And they're caught up in it to the point where they can say honestly, "Well, yeah, we do." If somebody hands you the ball and it's at the right time and they're going to put the right amount of effort into you, and if you can carry the ball, then it will work.

Clark: What led to you and Stan Lane breaking up the Fabulous Ones tag team? And then why didn't you go to the NWA with that?

Keirn: At that point in my life I was 35 years old. I looked at it like, "Okay, am I going to chase this rainbow?" I had two children that were getting ready to start school. They were babies, and they were getting ready to start school to the point where my daughter in. I have to say that the whole thing boiled down to that I kind of promised myself that I would take and raise them in one place and that I would not get caught up in the gypsy life of the wrestling business to be pushed to the point where with the cable networks flying guys around and all the different things going on, I said someday you have to walk away from the ring. Everybody does. Prepare yourself and don't let your ego get caught up with that you can't do anything else. Instead, feed yourself. What I did was I studied for a real estate license in the state of Florida. I tried to diversify and say I can't be forced into being pushed around in the wrestling business from this place to that place without any security and without saying, "Okay, you're going to go to the NWA in Atlanta and start working there." I had just gone to Florida to do the same thing, and they somehow or another had worked it around to closing the territory down. Okay, now you take a guy that's moving a family around. Even if this wasn't my home originally, I would have been going, "God, now where am I going to move? I've been here six months, and then he's saying, "Well, we're closing down. You're going to have to find a place to go."

You've got your family to come home to and say, "Well, they closed the territory down. There's not going to be anybody working here anymore. We have to move somewhere right now." And it's like, wow. You don't buy and sell houses that easy. I learned that when I got the real estate license. And the other part of it is, is you just can't put that kind of pressure on your family. You've got to be intelligent enough to find a way to do other things. And so I just tried. Then I got interested in owning in the wrestling business. That's when I just started saying, "Well, if I'm going to gamble, I'm going to make this gamble worth my while. I'm going to go for the biggest gamble I can, and that's to be an owner. Not a booker, not a wrestler, not the guy setting up the ring, not the guy that promotes one show a year, I've got to own a territory because I had never seen an owner of a territory poor. That was my goal. My goal in the wrestling business wasn't being the main event in a world title match. It was owning the wrestling business. Because I've already realized there's a certain amount of limitations. I knew I had the ability in the ring to give anybody a good match. But I'm still not a freak of nature. So I don't really have the drawing ability because of my size. You know, "Here comes 8'8" 900 pound Steve Keirn!" "And here comes 6'0" 240 pound Steve Keirn." And that's not a freak of f—ckin' nature anymore. I realized limitations. But instead of saying, "Oh God, I can't be the world's champion," I was thinking, "Well, if I can't be the world's champion or nobody wants me to be the top wrestler in their territory, then maybe I'll just own the damn territory!"

Clark: Could you describe that experience down there in Florida and booking and promoting that territory?

Keirn: The experience we had down here was a real education. But I'm glad I went through it because I would have never been satisfied in my life if I'd had thought, "I should have tried that, and I never did." I met a lot of people in doing this. The reason I did is because I started looking for avenues in the wrestling business to promote from different means. We didn't start out with a lot of money down here. We didn't have millions of dollars. Originally, it first started out with myself, Gordon Solie, Mike Graham, and Jerry Jarrett. We wanted to familiarize the people that were going to watch our show. We were going to film a regular show once a week. We wanted to give them something to identify with. And Gordon Solie was our key, we thought at the time, because if they had watched Florida wrestling, if they saw Gordon's face they'd know that they were on wrestling. When you turn a channel and you go by something that familiarizes you with it, whether it's the identical spot or not, sometimes you'll stop and watch. That was what we thought might help us out. Now, Jerry Jarrett had an up and running territory. He had talent. At the very beginning, he offered for us to come to Memphis and do our filming and record it there, do a separate sound stage with Gordon on it doing the commentating, like it was the Florida show. We had some wrestlers go up there from Florida. It all worked out kind of nice. The only problem was, you're dealing with, competing against multi-million dollar companies like WWF and Ted Turner. I mean, it's like you could never look important enough. Just having a small sound stage in a film studio with a crowd that couldn't be more than two rows deep, a lot of Cub Scouts, I mean it was at that time it was obvious that it wasn't going to compare or compete with and the guys weren't going to look as important because we didn't have the money to produce expensive things. But we gave it a gallant effort. Because we did actual videos and we did some things that were kind of tricky. We had a great content in our show. The wrestlers we had that were available down here were all hard workers, and they were good because they took pride in what they did. And it wasn't like they were expecting to make a million dollars. What they were expecting was that if it did work, they would have a job and they would be seen on a regular basis, if not by some other talent people that might be connected with larger organizations. Everybody got along really good because there wasn't too much of a boss/employee relationship. It was more like a bunch of friends trying to make a wrestling business go. The Nasty Boys were here for the whole time. We had Jim Backlund (now Jimmy Del Rey in SMW) down here. He is and was a great worker then, it's just that nobody had an opportunity to see him. People put Jimmy Backlund down saying that he wasn't no freak of nature size. But originally and all along, we've all known that he was a great worker, great asset, and that he didn't have to be the main event, he could be a great match on the card anywhere and mean something because he is a great worker. We have a lot of great workers down here in this state that never, ever got to show their ability or never got an opportunity to come out here and work. They're still down here. That's why there's a lot of opportunities down here that people are starting to open up.

When Mike Graham and I basically ended up with the PWF, we had gone through so many things. We had filmed television for three years straight. We had a lot of small shows. We never did any great attendance things. We never really made a good living for anybody that was down here, including ourselves. We drained all of the money that we had, that we had saved over all of our years in the wrestling business. I still am paying off for that wrestling business now. A bank loan. We went for a lot of different positions on that business, and one of the things was, Dusty Rhodes quit Atlanta. He asked if he could become a part of it. We cut him in right away because both of us had experienced the Dusty era in Florida how if Dusty Rhodes was on the card, it was either sold out or a great house. And when Dusty spoke on the mic, it was like somebody had chosen him to do that. I listen to Dusty Rhodes interviews like a fan from the beginning of the time I heard till even today. I was always entertained. I thought he was brilliant. I said, "God, having him as a

partner was like an honor." It's like he could have had the place and I could have worked for him if he'd made it successful. Because it would have been making more money than I was making with it not being as successful. But I don't know if Dusty being caught up from being in the big industry and all of that stuff to moving back down to a smaller area, even all the effort that he put into it, it was like we were trying to get a horse that was already dead, to get up and carry us somewhere. And it wasn't happening. He had responsibilities that he had with his family at that point by having a good job, that the first opportunity came along to him he had to take. And he went to the WWF at the time. The one thing I can honestly say about all of those situations was, whenever anybody got an opportunity to go on, everybody was happy for him. The Nasty Boys got a job with WCW out of here, and nobody went, "Man, you're not going to leave us are you?" They all went, alright, because that was what we were all wanting to do. If we weren't going to do it here, we were going to make some money somewhere, someday off of just staying busy. We went through some phenomenal experiences. We went to the Bahamas one time. The Bahamas Air decided just to run their flight an hour earlier. They didn't call anybody that was on the flight. It was a real strange situation. But we were out at the Tampa airport. A few of us were a little bit more than an hour early. And the Nasty Boys were dropping off Curt Hennig and some of the guys that had been in from the WWF at the time, so they were there early. All of a sudden, the announcer said they were going. And we went out the gate. We ended up going to the Bahamas with six guys, and we ran a show. The referee had to wrestle. We had to have the guy that was taking tickets, he had to come out and do the ring announcing and referee. It was unbelievable. I can look back at it and laugh at it now. I laugh at a lot of things. When I started losing my hair, was when I had the wrestling business. I didn't even pull it out either, it just started to fall out. If you're babysitting the Nasty Boys and a bunch of guys that are not making any money... One of our first trips out of the United States was the Bahamas. I thought like I was leading a Cub Scout group. None of us had any money. We were all there hoping that the show was going to do good and we were going to make some money. But we're there the whole day with nothing, and we said, "Let's go out and look around." I'm walking, and I've got five babyfaces with me. I look back and I've got the five heels that are working with him about a hundred yards back, following us along in Nassau. But it was fun. Like, we all grew up doing it, I think.

Clark: The camaraderie and the togetherness that you seemed to experience back then, do you see it much anymore in the business?

Keirn: Yeah, I see it, but I see it scattered. It's like somebody's taking a glass and just dropped it. And the camaraderie, the big pieces are the guys that are sticking closer together. I met a lot of guys that are from the Minnesota area. And those guys seem to stay together or they're friends. There's a lot of friends in the Florida area. I don't know if it's because that you kind of like identify with where you're living or if you associate with your upbringing and breaking into the business, or whatever it is. There's a certain amount. At the point we were in, when we were running the business and there was the camaraderie a little bit more, all I can say is; if the guys looked out at an audience and they saw that there was a lot of people there and then they felt like they didn't make that much money that night, then they would have felt like myself or Mike or anybody connected with trying to run it, was cheating them. The one benefit I can say about having really small crowds was, everybody knew nobody was getting cheated. Nobody could handle the Nasty Boys until me and Mike. And the only reason we could handle them was because they couldn't afford to do nothing, because we wouldn't pay them.

Clark: Did your experience down there change your attitudes that you had about the wrestling business?

Keirn: Not really. I love what I did. I've always respected my business and I've always gotten along with everybody in the wrestling business. I don't have any enemies in the wrestling business. Some guys can say, "Well, I hate this guy and I hate that guy." You know, these are all business associates. You go in there and you trust your life to each and everyone of them. Believe me, they could make mistakes on purpose to hurt you, and they don't do it. I don't care how bad of enemies you are, they just don't do that. There's a lot of respect and all of that. I just think that the way it is now, it's just everybody's scared. They're scared they're going to lose their job. The reason is, is because it's hard to go find another one. It's a fear. And the fear's not only in the wrestling business, it's in every business. It's America. It's not even America, it's the world. Everywhere we go, we see problems. So I don't think that there's anything wrong with the wrestling business right now that's not the same as everything else that's going on around it.

Clark: Of all the territories you've worked in, where were you the most happy and comfortable working in?

Keirn: The most happy I've been is originally in Florida, because that's where I started. I left and I went out and I got an education in the Mobile/Pensacola territory with Ricky Gibson as a partner, who was a great partner. I always believed that if you get a great partner, you'll learn to work as you watch, as you're right up there with him. You see every little thing that he does, and it helps you so much. Robert Gibson was his brother. When Robert was in school, Ricky and I would go pick him

up after school. He was just like a little junior high school kid. I've known them for years and years. My first partner was Stan Hansen, in Florida. He was straight out of the Baltimore Colts training camp. I don't know if he had been cut or what happened, but he was my first partner. We were partners for about a year. Then Ricky Gibson was my second partner, but Ricky was a lot more experienced and he had been around quite a while. He was into angles and all kinds of stuff. I had just gotten started in the wrestling business, and then I went onto Atlanta. At that time it wasn't a cable network, it was just the Atlanta stations, and then Columbus TV, Macon TV, and all that. Gordon Solie was announcing up there too. They made me the rookie of the year in 1974. And I don't know if they gave me the rookie of the year because they felt sorry for me or what, because I never won a match. It's like I was the out and out job guy. It was me and Bob Orton Jr. together, and we were the two biggest job guys there. We only worked the TVs. We'd work four or five times a week, and only get the TV's \$25. I mean we were really hungry then. I enjoyed it because I was still thrilled even doing it and I could foresee that it had potential.

Then I went to the Carolinas. I got a break there, but I wasn't the happiest there because the trips were really long and it was a real clique. That territory was the cliquish territory I've ever been in. You had to go to the office to do things. And I'd go to the office, and there'd be four or five guys down there buying donuts and going golfing together. And I'm going, "I gotta get out of here, because I don't golf and I don't like donuts!"

Then I came back into Florida and it was perfect timing. They didn't have a young babyface at the time that was a white kid. They had Cyclone Negro. They had Pork Chop Cash. They had great workers, but this was the first time that I was a minority that was just in the right time at the right place. I had been Tiger Conway Jr.'s partner in the Carolinas, and it was great. It really got over good because it was a black and white thing. Then I went down to Florida, and there was a lot of guys here that had a lot of talent, but it was just perfect timing to be able to have gotten already about three years experience under my belt, and then now come down and utilize what I had learned. So they really pushed me hard here and surrounded me with all kinds of opportunities. I was probably the most excited, and I still wasn't the happiest, because the happiest is when you make the most money. It's just simple. You can be doing a lot of great things, but if you're still hungry, you're not really happy then.

Then moving around, Tennessee was a great experience. We made a lot of money there. I would say that was some of the happiest times because I was learning things and I was not only learning more and more about wrestling everyday. I had it set in my mind how wrestling should be for years. When you're educated in Florida--it was a real strict, a lot of amateur style, very aggressive--and then you go to a place where they're not aggressive, they're going, "Hey man, what are you on? Just loosen up. This is not what we do here. You don't need to kill me." And here I had come from a place where everybody was killing everybody. So I guess Tennessee was a great experience. It made me happy. The happiest is, I can't even answer that. I'd say, let me say Tennessee because I made the best money there. I thought it was going to be in the WWF. At first I was happy, but then I was almost to the point where I got kind of stale and bored. It just wasn't exciting. It wasn't really that much fun to me. You know, the wrestling business has a time when it's fun. Even the guys like Scott Hall, when he was working for us in the Florida wrestling. As Razor Ramon, he'd say, "You know, I'm doing a lot better than I ever did, but that was a lot of fun when we did that down in Florida--everybody was really happy. Nobody was suspicious of anything. They didn't say, "Oh God, what's going to happen tomorrow? Are they going to fire me? No, they need me. Because they know I'll work for free!"

Clark: Does it bother you that for a long time in the 1980s the smaller but talented wrestlers were overlooked and misused in the States?

Keirn: I believe that there's a certain amount of destiny in this. A lot of guys, including myself--we're all guilty of it--I've looked at other people and said, "Wow, I should be in that position, because I'm better than them." But in all honesty, I accepted it quite a while back that while I might not make it to the top, I'm going to be remembered in my business. And that's going to be quite an accomplishment because there's so many thousands that go through it. And the real way to look at life is, if you can make a mark in your life that people identify with you.. I looked at being in the wrestling business where I didn't make comparables. Like, I didn't get in and say, "How much are you making tonight?" Because I had partners that were better talent than I was, and they should have been paid better than I was. And if I didn't have the intelligence to see that, then I was blind, like a lot of people are. I'll give you an example. If I had Dusty Rhodes for my partner in 1978 against let's say Terry Funk & Dory Funk at the Miami Beach Convention Center, I knew that I wasn't going to make what those three guys were going to make. But I didn't say, "God, I should have had this. Why was I overlooked in my money? I put in as much effort." It's just like I just accepted that. Now the same thing happens with when they overlooked a lot of people, they weren't educated on those people. There was no such thing as talent scouts. All they had to do was rely on people's opinions about them. If they found a tape, and if they watched the tape. You know, there's a lot of tapes people didn't watch, I'm sure. But there's also this really sad thing about the wrestling business. And it's, anybody can start a rumor about anybody else. And they can pass that rumor around.

Clark: And boy, it catches fire.

Keirn: And it sure does. That's one of the really sad parts about it. Sometimes they play a really vicious game in it. That's one of the good things about not having any enemies. I mean, if you don't have any enemies, then you don't sit around worrying about it. And a lot of times, nothing happens. They forget about you before they really say anything bad about you. You just go un-talked about. I'll give you an example. Bobby Eaton. To me, Bobby Eaton is one of the greatest wrestlers the wrestling business has ever seen. But he's overlooked to a certain amount. But it's not like he's bad-mouthed, everybody will agree with me, but he's not given his fair share of our business. He can make anybody look great. He can make himself look great. And he can do it with the professionalism of nobody else. And he's not the top guy. He's got to take everything for face value. And then plus, you're only as important as your promotion makes you. In other words, I can remember years ago there was a guy named Ernie Beemus. He went as Mr. Clean. And I overheard a conversation with Louie Toulette, who was the booker at the time in the Florida territory, say, "I'll bet you," and I don't remember how much money it was but it was with Paul Jones, the one in North Carolina, then he says, "I can make some money with this guy." And Ernie Beemus, Mr. Clean, was probably at that point in my career, the worst wrestler that I had ever seen in my life. The comparable to him was a George Gulas. The guy had absolutely no concept of what the f-k was going on. Nowhere near it, and he was already looking like he was somebody's grandpa. He was an old-timer, he had his head shaved, he had the gold earring, and he had an awful body. He had a muscular body, but it was an old muscular body that looked like it would need to be put away. And they went out there and they proceeded to make money with him because that they took the time and the effort. And with the Ultimate Warrior, they took the time and the effort and they had something to work with because the guy looked fantastic. He had interviews that were unique. He could say something, and people were paying attention. Whether it made any f-kin sense or not; I listened to some of that, and I said, "What did he just say? Somebody remind that, I didn't understand that." It was like, you knew he was gone. But, people were fans. The idea is, it's who can put somebody's ass every eleven inches in seats. That was years ago, now it's about every forty-two inches. The asses have gotten bigger!

Clark: What had you been doing before the WWF contacted you, and were you shocked or surprised that they were interested in using you?

Keirn: As a matter of fact, the WWF didn't contact me and offer me a job. Hulk Hogan got me a job. I saw Jimmy Hart one day here in Tampa, and I was talking to him, and I said, "You know, I'd really like to go up there someday. I've never really had an opportunity to go to New York." He said, "Well, I'll mention that." Most of the time people just don't go out and call up, and say, "Hey, you want a job?" You have to be interested in getting a job first. Especially when they've got an up and running business that's doing great. And they're going to say, "Well, let's go looking for somebody. Has anybody seen Steve Keirn?" (jokingly) "No, I think he's dead." No, it wasn't like that. So I made it apparent that I wanted a job. He got in touch right away with Hogan, and Hogan and I knew each other for so many years because we grew up and went to school together, all these things. He appreciated my ability. He told me that he had a lot of respect for me and my style and wrestling, and he knew that no matter what I did out there, what they asked of me, I could do it. And he said he'd like to recommend me. I thought I was like honored again. He went to Vince McMahon and he got me the job. It's just as simple as that. I didn't do a try-out. I didn't send a film. I went right straight up there, went in and sat down, and he said, "Well, let's figure out what we can make you."

Clark: Did you have any feelings of unease working in an organization that had mainly featured larger type wrestlers?

Keirn: No. No, I have a lot of confidence in myself. Within probably a year of working there, fifty percent of the people I associated with there asked me for my advice on maneuvers in the ring, to finishes in the ring, to everything. That's because I spoke from my heart and I gave them honest answers. If you asked me, "What would you do or how would you do this or what is there to do?" And then, I'd say, "Okay, let me think about it." I'd think about it sincerely. I wouldn't think about it as a big joke, that they were asking me something to make a stupid answer out of. I'd try to help them. Because the sad thing is, is that if you don't help somebody in the wrestling business that's trying to do good, then it's like you're worried about your position. You can't be worried about that. It's a fair business. A lot of guys will extend a lot of offers in there to help each other. That's one of the reasons why I like the business so much. If somebody says to anybody in the dressing room, "Could you help me with this?" They'll give it their best effort, or if they don't think they've got the ability, they'll say, "Hey, ask him. There's the best way to get the advice. Go to him." And I got a lot of people that started coming to me on a regular basis asking me things, over a short period of time.

I didn't think about guys that had been through there, or how big they were, or what they could do. I wasn't intimidated at all. As a matter of fact, I felt overqualified a lot of times because there was such a different style there. I started feeling like, "Well gosh, I don't even need half the stuff I know here." It's common sense. Anybody that tries to exaggerate it one side more than the other is usually

trying to get something out of it. They're trying to say, "If you need to go this far with this," sometimes they're saying, "This will benefit me too." But the things that I'm asked as far as an opinion or advice or something like that, just like anybody else would give, they'd give the answers that I would give. Unless they just hated the other guy's guts, they'd say, "Yeah, just go in there and kick that guy in the face. He'll love it. You'll get his attention, and the bookers will go crazy."

Clark: Who came up with the idea of the Skinner character?

Keirn: Vince McMahon came up with the Skinner character. I fed him as much as I could feed him on the potential I had, with a limited amount. I mean, I wasn't the greatest showman in the world. I know I could go in there and have a wrestling match, but that wasn't that important in the WWF. A great wrestling match wasn't what they were looking for. They were looking for what they are accustomed to, and that was characters appeal to audience, plus marketing ability and merchandising and stuff like that.

I had done a lot with the alligator business. I had participated in a hunt and killed fifteen alligators, and thought maybe that would help. I took up alligator skins, and skulls, and claws, and stuff, and said, "Any of this stuff or any way you want to make it, or anything like that? My dad was a Prisoner of War, he's a war hero. I could be Mom's apple pie, All-American boy. I could do any of that kind of stuff. I could do anything you want me to do. And here's as much information." And then he turned it over to his art department. It took about three weeks before I saw anything, like that they had an idea. They flew me back up there, costumed me in the Skinner outfit, and started kind of prepping me for it by saying, "Compare it to a guy in the movie *Deliverance*, one of those rednecks in the woods, and just go wild out of the Everglades." So it was easy for me to get into, because I had friends that were "swampy" people and of the Everglades kind. Then I watched the movie a couple times to try to pick up a real Southern accent for him. I noticed they were all chewing tobacco, so I added the liquorice to the thing where I'm chewing a big mouthful of liquorice. I tried to be kind of grotesque. My opinion of a heel is, it's got to be somebody that's almost to the point of disgusting that people don't like him.

Clark: Sort of along the lines of the Bastion Booger character?

Keirn: Right, yeah. He's a heel, there's no other way you can... Now they'll probably turn him babyface now that I said that. Anyway, that was the way the character was developed. And Vince came up with the idea, came up with the name, everything, and then he gave me the character. We went out and did some vignettes, and they spent some money and time. I supplied them with the places to go, because I was like the real deal. We were out in the alligator waters. The camera guys were freaking out. I have a friend that owns an alligator farm here, and we went out into the swamp there. They said, "Is there any danger around here?" I said, "Yeah, the danger's everywhere here." But it was fun for me cause I was real comfortable in that atmosphere. I had been there.

Then after that, I think what happened with the character more or less though was, I was working with Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat all around and then he had some kind of problem, and ended up leaving and going to the WCW. Then I was left without an opponent, so they just abandoned me when they abandoned his deal. They just put me in there just to do whatever I could do. From then on, when I thought they lost interest in that character, I thought, "Well, boy, you sure passed up a great opportunity." Even if it wasn't me portraying the character, they had a lot of potential to do a lot of stuff with that character. Anybody in the wrestling business that witnessed Skinner very much, would say, "Well, God, I thought they were going to do more with him."

Clark: Were the initial plans for the character Skinner for it to go somewhere or was it just developed to be a bottom card wrestler?

Keirn: Well, you can't answer that unless you're in the office. I couldn't answer that. Maybe the initial character wasn't going anywhere to begin with. You can never really answer those inside things. You could come to your opinion or you could say, "Well, maybe somebody didn't like the guy, maybe they didn't like me." Who knows? Maybe they didn't ever have anything in mind, and it went farther than they thought, and they said, "S-t, we should have done something with him to begin with, but now we haven't really done nothing." You know, you never know what the answer is. I mean I wish I owned the character. I wish that it wasn't licensed to the WWF. I'd love to have him. I don't want to really duplicate him because then it's just an imitation, but I'd like to have the character Skinner and utilize him some place else.

Clark: Could you describe your philosophy on working as Skinner, and how it compares to your methods working as Steve Keirn?

Keirn: Working as Skinner, I looked at it with a certain amount of realism; that if this guy was a guy coming out of the Everglades, why should he be able to do fireman carry takedowns, go-behinds, suplexes? I mean, why should he be able to do all these moves? And Steve Keirn was a babyface that didn't have anything exceptionally large in size, like height or weight, so what he had to do was he had to make an excessive amount of moves. In other words, he had to have audiences

thinking that he was almost dead, and come out from underneath it somehow or another, realistically enough to where they bought tickets. So Steve Keirn had to be a totally different kind of a wrestler. He had to be more or less an aggressor because the old kind of wrestler that said "hi, how you doing, I love you," and wave at the kids from ringside, they don't pay attention to that. They want to see a guy that if he got kicked in the face, he'd get up and kick you in the face too. He maybe didn't initiate the aggressive moves, but when it comes to being aggressive, he got overly-aggressive. The Skinner guy, if I was coming out of the Everglades and I was supposed to be some backwards redneck, and I went out there and made all these scientific moves and I tried to go move for move with a guy like Bret Hart or something like that, I think that the character would have been lost, and that this wasn't even a real deal. Really, if I go out there and if I take all the moves Bret Hart initiates on me with no ways to get out of them but going to the ropes, then it doesn't look like I've got the ability, so obviously I am out of the Everglades. That's the difference in the two characters. But I feel like that I did a good enough job that I got enough people to write that I couldn't wrestle anymore! So I did what I set out to accomplish.

Clark: How did you feel about switching characters from Skinner to Doink the Clown II?

Keirn: All it was is, is was business to me. I'm not broken-hearted. I've had Jerry Jarrett mention to me about had I ever thought about the possible of putting me and Stan Lane together again to be the Faulous Ones, because there's nothing in the country right now that has that same appeal, that it might catch on. I guess he's working with Vince a little bit here and there, and he just thought it would be something up there that they could use. And I just told Jerry Jarrett, I said, "Listen Jerry, that was a great thing at one time. But if you go back and try to duplicate it, then people will recognize that, and there's always going to be a certain amount of it lacking. So I'd rather it went down in history as a good thing, than coming back up from history, and then demolishing the whole thing."

But going from Skinner to Doink was basically just a move in a position from one to another, hoping that I could get more longevity out of my business and possibly more money. It wasn't an upgrade or a downgrade, it was just another grade. Jimmy Hart started calling me the Lon Chaney Jr of professional wrestling.

Clark: What kind of an experience was your debut at Wrestlemania as the second Doink?

Keirn: Well, that five and a half hours under the ring, I guess that was one of things I had never done in the wrestling business. If you're going to say when's the first, that's the first time I had ever sat underneath the ring that long.

Clark: This might be a very stupid question. But what do you do under a wrestling ring for five and a half hours?

Keirn: I was very patient! There wasn't anything to do. Except to try to calm down, because you're just pumped solid with adrenalin under there. I had a monitor under there to watch the show. But it didn't come on for the first hour I was under there and it went off for the last hour that I was under there. It was kind of like watching Wrestlemania at home. Another way of putting it, it was like being under somebody's bed watching it.

Clark: What do you think happened to the plans they had for the second Doink character? It seems as though it was just dropped.

Keirn: I have no idea. I guess that's all the plans they had. I had a lot more things that I could have assisted with, as far as advice on it. I always thought that the two against each other would be good. I thought of first originally bringing out and exposing the other one, and then having tag team matches as the two heels, Doink. You know, because they could switch and do so much stuff. But that never happened. Then I thought it could go right from that to one messing up, the other getting in a big fight with him. And now you've got them against each other. The audience is so confused. One comes out and says, "Well, I'll set this straight." He comes out and has a red wig on one night. So you've got a green wig and a red wig. The next time they come out, the other one's got a red wig on. Now you've got two with red wigs on again. Everybody's back to being confused.

Clark: Are you kind of upset though about the lack of communication about what they were going to do with your position in the company?

Keirn: Well, not really. And I'll tell you why. A lot of people get upset about being overlooked or being passed up for some reasons. But I had a hand in running a wrestling business. And sometimes it's not so much that you're overlooked, it's just that everything is trying to focus in on something else so hard, that it just doesn't come up. And you've just got to accept that and you've got to go on to something else. It's like, you can't take the way fate is dealt to you as that it's always bad. You can only say, "Well, maybe it's better I didn't do this right now. Maybe it's better they didn't go with the clown thing." You've got to come out with a positive on these negatives sometimes. I'm not upset about anything. I'm not irate towards anybody or

anything. When you look at it realistically of what the whole thing is, is that sometimes guys jump to conclusions and think they were dealt a bad hand because somebody just didn't like them. But in dealing hands at one time, I realize that it's kind of hard to make everybody happy. If it's a personal relationship that you have... Say you're my brother, and you're looking at it from your brother's attitude point. And you're going, "Well God, they should give you the opportunity they're giving the Ultimate Warrior." Of course, you say it like that. But if you're trying to be honest with yourself, and that's who you've got to convince anyway--it's not convincing the people around you--you just say, "Well, I guess that wasn't the answer."

Clark: Why exactly did you depart the WWF?

Keirn: I think that it was like the handwriting was on the wall. What was happening there was, they were cutting back to one town a night. They already had mentioned that a lot of guys weren't going to be working full-time and that they were going to have to give out some releases, and that some guys were going to be part-time. And I thought, "Well, I'm pretty safe because I'm the other Doink, right." Then I started thinking about it, "Well, they're going to get to the point where they might just use one Doink." And then Terry Taylor had mentioned to me that he heard that some guys were getting their releases. He wasn't sure about me, but he thought I might be too. So instead of waiting, I just called Vince at home and said, "Listen, Vince, I heard I was going to get a release. I'm at the point in my career where I don't want to get it from some agent in a town. If you want to release me for some reason, I want it to come right from you and I want to hear it from you." And he said to me that he didn't want to get rid of me, he didn't want to release me because he appreciated my ability and my talent, and that I had been loyal, and did all the things that I was asked of in the wrestling business to do. Which was what I had been educated to do all my life anyway. It wasn't some big exceptional job that I had done. But anyway, it was unusual I guess that you didn't get in an argument with him to quit. So I just said, "Let me make this easy for you. I'll just go ahead and finish up, and then you've released me and I've quit, and everybody's happy. At least you got what you needed to do accomplished." And he goes, "Well, I'm going to have part-time work. But I know you've got to support a family and I know you might want to move on." I said, "Sure, I would. And I've enjoyed working for you." I did real well there. I got to travel to a lot of places and stuff. So I didn't want to have any hard feelings and I don't have no hard feelings. It's just that the time comes when you're just not in the right spot at the right time. So you've got to be smart enough to realize it, and don't start crying. Just say, "Hey, I'm a man." Stand up and say, "Okay, if this is it, this is it. Let's shake hands, and maybe I can come back to work for you someday. And if I don't, well, then you can just kiss my ass."

Clark: Are you interested in using the Skinner or the Doink names?

Keirn: Neither name really. Semi-characters maybe. I hate the name Doink. I told my kids when they first gave him that gimmick, I went, "Holy s--t, can you believe it? Aren't you glad they didn't make Daddy Doink?" And then here I am! I had to eat my words on that one.

Clark: Did your kids get teased at all in school about their father wrestling dressed up as a clown, or did it even affect them?

Keirn: No, my kids have done real good in school with their friends. I've been pretty open with all their friends. Randy "Macho Man" and I have gone down to the school and talked to my kids. Yeah, that was a real comparable one day. I dressed up like Skinner and he dressed up as Macho Man. He stood on one side of the classroom, I stood on the other, and we got third graders going, "Woowow."

But I tell you, I like the character Skinner because I felt like that's what identified me with the WWF. Doink wasn't, Doink was just a phase and the business part. The thing that I identified me with and the thing that people will remember me for in there, was Skinner. And I like Skinner. My kids like Skinner. Everybody likes Skinner. All the family likes Skinner. All of my friends in the wrestling business and out of the wrestling business like Skinner. That's what made me proud. I mean they said, "Wow, you really do that character good." And I started getting really ugly. It started scaring the hell out of me. I'd wake up in the morning, I'd stand up, and there's a mirror right at the side of our bed, and I'd go, "Woo," and that was the first thing I had to look at.

Clark: Do you still feel you have a chance to do more with the Skinner character with other promotions out there?

Keirn: Oh yeah, God, I've got a lot of open opportunities. I've got a friend that is in the alligator business, and makes boots and stuff like that. I've been talking to him. He's moved from Tampa out to Los Angeles now, and he's in real close contact with Burt Reynolds and knows a lot of the movie industry people from making them alligator skins and boots and stuff. I talked to him a couple days ago, and I proposed a business opportunity for Hollywood for some stuff. He said, "Wow, what great ideas." And real quick, he called some people, and he got back to me that night and told me, "Man, are they interested."

See, I have these ideas for production in the wrestling business that I think are

very 90ish. The wrestling business is an opinion. It's one opinion opposed to another opinion. But I have an idea for production that I think would take one of the companies far surpass the other company. But I proposed it to Hollywood from a long-ranged idea, and they're accepting it. And neither one of the wrestling companies are getting the advantage of it, so I don't know if I'm ever even going to end up in the wrestling business with it now. It's all based on production and the concept that I outlined. It could be taken over onto a different level and brought on something, but it's still a production thing. They enjoyed it and liked it so much. I've talked to the people in the WCW a little bit, and I'd be interested in going in there and pursuing it farther, but it's like I want to do this in the wrestling business, this production stuff. At the same time, if it doesn't come about, it's just like one of those things where they overlooked Skinner, they overlooked Doink, it just never came up. It might come up some place else, and they said, "Well, you should have told us." I say, "Well, nobody ever asked me."

Clark: As a recent employee for the WWF, how have the terrible houses around the country effected the morale of the wrestlers?

Keirn: It's been awful for them. Nobody can say that working in front of less and less people every night is going to make you happy, because you don't feel like you're doing your job. And the boys are the most depressed of all in public. Now the owners and the people that are behind the scenes like the promoters, they might be depressed when they're around you and to a point where they portray it a little bit, but you always think that they have more money than you do. So you're feeling like, "Hey, you're depressed? I've got to come here every night and wrestle in front of these handfuls of people." So you get a good house and you're ready to take a backdrop to the ceiling, or you get the regular house and you're ready to just kind of like slide down somebody's back. It's depressing, but at the same time, wrestling goes in circles. And something will happen that will kick it back in gear for some things. It'll just happen. I've seen it go through some real depressing times. And this is one of the depressing times. But the country's in a depression, so you can't expect them to be out buying wrestling tickets when they can't afford to feed their families or buy a house or buy a car.

Clark: Has the organization also been affected by the investigation into Vince McMahon and the WWF? And has that affected the wrestlers?

Keirn: I don't think it has, and I'll tell you why. Nobody really knows what's going on. It's all rumors. Until somebody comes out and identifies what's happening here, you can't be depressed about that. He's getting stones thrown at him, that something happened. The idea is that fifty percent of the people are going to believe it automatically and fifty percent are going to defend him automatically. I'm in the wrestling business and I hear more stuff about lawsuits and different things, but I've learned after this many years of being in it, don't believe it until it happens. People have told me different things from somebody's going to jail to nobody's going to jail, that this guy's in trouble or that guy's in trouble, and I'm going, "Where the hell are you all reading all this?" And it's like, "Well, so and so told me here and so and so told me there."

I tell you, I'm a hell of a ribber in the wrestling business. I take backseat to only one man, and that's Fuji. Mr. Fuji is the top ribber. He's the master. But right underneath him is me, and I'll claim that spot.

Clark: (jokingly) Well, I must tell you, in an earlier interview that I did, Marty Jannetty claimed that spot!

Keirn: (jokingly) Oh no, he's just a punk. He's just a punk trying to get his feet wet. He can't go without getting busted, that's his problem. He's good at it, but he's stupid, because he gets caught. He almost wants to tell somebody he's done it, so he can't stop smiling.

I guess one of the funniest times to me in the WWF was when they sent out a memo on no more ribbing. I mean, why don't you tell them, "Okay, don't wrestle or rib." I should have saved that, but I don't think I did, because that was classic. The rib was, is I think it was dedicated to me, because some serious ribs were happening at about that time.

Clark: Do you think it's a good, healthy situation where Vince McMahon is sending talent down to the organizations and cooperates with the very, very few territories left, such as Smoky Mountain Wrestling and Jeff Jarrett's Memphis group?

Keirn: I don't know if it's healthy, I don't know if it's going to do anybody any good, but at least it's an effort. Why not try it? Guys have been suggesting that for five or six years, to get a farm territory where guys can learn to work or can practice their skills in front of fewer people, and draw from the same farm territory where the guys are good that are doing it. I think anything's good that's experimented. You can't say that it's going to work, but you can't say it's bad when you don't even know. Only ignorant people talk like that. They say, "Oh, that sucks. That ain't going to work." "How do you know?" After you've done this and gambled with it a little bit, you've got to stop and say, "Well, how does that guy know?" They don't. To be honest with you, I don't think Vince McMahon in all the success he's had, realizes how much luck was involved in it. If you stop and look at it, there was a lot of luck. A lot of

things happened at the right time for him and he did great. But it's like, he's in a position where he has to experiment now. He can't just sit back and say, "Well, the WWF's in town." And that's the way it used to be.

Clark: What do you think is happening to the business for Jerry Lawler and Jim Cornette to show up in the World Wrestling Federation?

Keirn: I don't think that anything unique is happening for them to show up because they've got credibility as talent.

Clark: But some major things have been happening in the business...

Keirn: They hadn't been happening, and that's because they were never needed. Somebody's opening their eyes and says, "I need change. I need to change." And other people are right there waiting to help change. And it's just at the right time. You can talk to a Jimmy Cornette or you can talk to a Jerry Lawler on a business standpoint, and they understand business. They've run it, they've participated, and all of that. Somebody calls them up and says, "Let's try this," they're going to be open for an opportunity. And then the guy that's giving the opportunity has got to weigh it out, and say, "Are any of these little territories doing any business? Well, Memphis is still hanging in there. Smoky Mountain seems to be doing a little business. Okay, let's communicate with those two then. If they're doing business on a small scale, then why couldn't we do big business on a small scale brought up to a big scale?"

Clark: Did you ever get involved in any of the decision making or any of the booking for WWF, or would you have liked to?

Keirn: Oh yeah. God, I'd like to have got my hands in there and started ripping. I'd have been all over that place.

Clark: What are some of the positive and negative things you think they've been doing recently?

Keirn: I'm not watching. I'm not watching at all. Believe me, I've seen enough wrestling in my life to last three or four lifetimes. It's like a guy that lays tile all day long, and somebody goes, "Guess what? On Tool Time tonight they're going to lay tile." Unless one of my friends calls me up and says, "Hey, I'm in a match tonight on TV. Would you watch it and see what you think?" Or I see something all of a sudden come across while I'm flipping the channels, if there's somebody that I like that's working, I'll watch it. When Typhoon went to the WCW, bless his heart, I felt so sorry for him. He's a real close friend. He's a great guy. I can't express my feelings towards him. But the only thing I can say is, if it was going to happen to somebody, I could think of about four or five people I'd want something like that to happen to, and he's not one of them. I knew he was going to be on making a debut, and I watched the Clash to see him come on. God, I hated to see that. I love that guy. That could happen to me as Skinner and I could get out of that. As a matter of fact, I could have gone back through the other way. You have to really know him personally almost to feel as bad as I felt for him. He's a really super human being. His kids, his mom and his dad, and his family, he's got a lot of love in his heart. He's a pure gentleman from start to finish. And he's one great big son of a bitch, so I wouldn't laugh at him because he'd kill me!

Clark: Where do you think the WWF is headed now?

Keirn: If I could answer that, I'd go right now down to the corner and I'd walk in the store and I'd say, "Give me one of them lotto tickets and let me tell you what number I want, because I know it's going to be that and I'm going to win." I can't say that. Let me give you the perfect answer for that, because it's the truth. Hulk Hogan used to come to me when I was wrestling and he wasn't, on the beach in Tampa where we grew up, which we called Port Tampa, and he'd come to me and say, "Man, I want to wrestle. I want to be a wrestler." And you know what I'd tell him? I'd tell him, "Listen Terry, man, you can't make any money doing this s--t." So you can't ask me to predict the future on anything. I've had to eat my words on that conversation for like twenty years. "You can't make no money doing this s--t." "Well, maybe you can't, Steve!"

Clark: Would you consider Vince McMahon a genius for what he done in the wrestling business?

Keirn: No, I don't consider that there's any geniuses in the wrestling business. I consider they're lucky people that happen to be in the right place at the right time. If he was a genius, then he'd be successful right now to the point where he wouldn't need anybody or anything. Like he wouldn't be calling the Jerry Lawler's, he wouldn't be calling the Smoky Mountains, he wouldn't be doing the things that we're seeing happening. That's a genius.

Clark: But I'm also talking about his ability to come up with gimmicks with particular wrestlers. The creativity he has and the way he is able to design and fit a perfect gimmick for a wrestler like a tailor fitting suits. Do you consider him a genius at that?

Keirn: I consider him very talented. You can't call him a genius. It's like somebody asking me if wrestling's fake. And I say, yes. I can say that real easy. And if I say that Vince is a genius, then he would have been on the money on every character. Okay, that's a genius. He's very talented and he's made some great accomplishments, but Jerry Jarrett's done the exact same thing. Any guy that's had the opportunity to create does it. Dusty Rhodes can do the exact same thing. These are highly intelligent individuals that are polished on one business. So that they can produce some people. But Vince McMahon took Big Steel Man and made him Tugboat. And that wasn't a genius move to me. He had a great character that he could have gone with there in Typhoon being a big construction worker, that was a real good character that he could have had because nobody owned it. We called him U.S. Steel when we had him as the big construction worker, and he fit the part. He did not fit the part of a f--kin giant Popeye. So he (Vince) hit on a lot of them, and he missed on a few. So he's a great talent and it takes a lot of ability to do that, but a genius doesn't miss on any.

Clark: What is most important to you in your life right now and what goals do you have for yourself for your future?

Keirn: The most important thing to me in my life right now is my family. And it will always come first above anything; wrestling business, real estate, no matter what it is. My goals in my life right now are to stay in the wrestling business at a point where I can go from either wrestler into executive or helping with the planning and helping with the future of younger wrestlers and trying to figure out what the future's going to be, to the point that that's something I know. Wrestling is not a prerequisite for any other occupation. I mean I can't take my knowledge of twenty years and go out there and all of a sudden get a job selling cars. You're qualified as a wrestler after this many years to be a bouncer or a truck driver or maybe you could be a weatherman with a funny voice. But the idea is, I'd like to stay in what I know the best, because this is my comfort zone. But if not, my goal in life is just to continue and supply my family with the best living that I can and keep my health. I think we're all guided by certain things. And right now I feel like I'm being guided by the love and the warmth of my family because we're trying to form a relationship that is like the perfect American home with the values of religion, love, honor, trust, honesty, things like that. And I've learned a lot. I used to think that happiness and all of that was around the value of money and wealth was what you owned. But now I've gotten to the point where I realize wealth is my health, wealth is my family, wealth is being able to just get up every morning and say, "Well, I don't have any enemies," and things like that. It sounds kind of silly, but at the same time it's the truth. It's like, if I don't win the lotto every week, I'm not crying. What I think about is, if I won it, would it be a mistake? Would I think that being a millionaire is going to make me a happier person or would it just ruin my life and my family? I know a lot of people that were very wealthy in my career, and most of the ones that I've met that were wealthy with money and possessions, ended up miserable somehow or another, right down to wrestling promoters.

Clark: How would you like to be remembered in the professional wrestling business?

Keirn: (jokingly) I'm the guy that originated the forearm! I want to be remembered for that, because to originate anything in the wrestling business is a hard claim to fame. (seriously) I think that the most you want to be remembered for is from your peers that when you were asked to do something that you didn't say, "I'm not going to do it." In other words, you said you'll do anything for them, because you have professional courtesy. It's a simple thing. When there's an old reunion and I'm a hundred years old and they all come there, they're going to say, "Yeah, that Keirn, he was stiff. He'll do anything for you out there, plus hurt you."

INTERVIEW SENSATIONAL SHERRI MARTEL

The following interview that was published in issue #31 with Sensational Sherri Martel was conducted via telephone from her home near Birmingham, Alabama on July 18, 1993.

John Clark: Could you describe your childhood and interests that you had growing up?

Sherri Martel: I'm one of two daughters. My mother raised two girls by herself. My sister's younger, she's 32. I'm 35. My sister used to always love to go horseback riding. And I was born to rollerskating. I always used to get mad at her because she wouldn't take me, but she said I was such a sissy. When my mom would take us fishing when we were little--that was kind of like our family thing together--I would never want to put worms on my own hook. So she's always thought I was a sissy. And getting into wrestling, that's quite contradictory to the sister she had grown up to know. My mom is divorced, and she's a chef. We've pretty much got a close-knit family. There are no arguments in our house because we all feel that there's nothing that we can't sit down and openly discuss with each other. My mom's kind of cool. Her birthday is April 9, and her biggest thing was going out to Vegas to the Wrestlemania and stuff like that. But before that she worked really hard raising two

girls on her own, actually. But I live with my mom now, I'm paying her place off. And it's just that I guess every child of their parents wants to do something for them, to set them up in their later years so they don't have to worry about that kind of thing. It's always been really important to me if I ever made everything really good, I wanted to just make sure that she was taken care of. Because God knows, her and each and every parent alive has had their share of hard knocks. Let's face it, it's not an easy world to live in. It doesn't seem like it's getting any better, looking at CNN and reading the papers and everything.

Clark: What kind of education did you go through?

Martel: I went through high school. And I was going to go to college, but decided not to. I went into hair styling. And at the time I went through the whole course except for 200 hours, and then I kind of got sidetracked and I started getting interested in wrestling. So I put that on hold, which is something I'm about to renew again. I'm going back to beauty school. While I was in the tenth grade I won an art scholarship to the University of Missouri, as I was always really good at free-hand and charcoal drawings and still-life compositions. I've never been too good with people, I kind of draw stick people. I think I do a lot better on horses and animals and anything that's pretty much still-life. I'm not very good at drawing houses or designing houses, however I've been diddling with them a little bit lately, and it's getting a little bit better.

Clark: What is it that you're going to be doing now and are there any other fields you're interested in exploring or looking into?

Martel: Right at the present time the only thing I really want to get back into is school and get my cosmetology license because I'd like to plan to open a beauty salon with all the pictures and everything of all the people that I've met during my wrestling career. I'm going to put that in the front room and the entrance way. It's just going to take me a little time. I just have to go through a nine month course to get my licence again, because all my previous hours are revoked. It's just one of those things that you have to go through. Nothing of value is gained easily. You don't appreciate it as much if it's just given to you.

Clark: Were there any other careers you wanted to get into before you got into wrestling or when you were growing up?

Martel: I went through a nursing aide course because my mother at one time was a nurse's aide. She also worked in the kitchen and dietary department. My mom is an exquisite cook. That's my only downfall at home. I'm no different than anybody else, there's no cooking like your mom's cooking. But I finished the nursing aide training. That was pretty cool and everything but it was kind of depressing and I realized that there are people out there that care and help, but I didn't see myself going through life doing it. I wanted to be more creative with my mind and with my hands. That's quite contradictory compared to thirteen years of beating my body up. Hopefully, I've gained a little knowledge along the way.

Clark: What was it about the professional wrestling business that first got you interested in it?

Martel: My mom took me when I was real little. I had wanted to be a clown. But it's kind of like you have to grow up to be in that position, and kids are trained from the time they're toddlers on up for that profession. So that was out because it's relatively a family oriented business. But my mom started taking me to wrestling when I was relatively young. It kind of stuck with me. I remember the very first match I ever went to see was in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, it was Cowboy Bob Kelly against The Outlaw Frank Daulton. During school break she would drag me and my sister up there and make us watch it on TV. I said, "No, I don't want to watch that." At first I didn't really care for it because I just thought it was just some other goofy thing that guys like to do, and I wasn't interested in it. But after she got me into going with her, as everybody else can tell you, it's addicting. It's very addicting. She took me and I finally got to the point where I really started getting interested and I started thinking to myself, I can do that. I was taking a little gymnastics in school, and it was required with P.E. I was probably fifteen at that time. It would be five and a half, six years later before I would even get to where I could go to a school anywhere. I got to know the promoter there--it was Mid South that was running down there--it was LeRoy McGuirk, Grizzly Smith, Bill Watts. I was fifteen at the time, and not long after that I went and I talked to Grizzly Smith and he told me that I was too young and to come back and see him in about five years, if I was still interested. So I did what he told me to. I got everything together--finished school, got all my priorities, what I wanted done--then I went back to him when I was twenty, after I had been married and had my son Jared. I was divorced at that time. I sat down at what I thought was going to be the most exciting breakfast of my life with someone because I actually had to sell myself and convince this person (Grizzly Smith) that was in this "phenomenal business" that I wanted to be in, that this is what I really wanted to do. He talked to me and he told me all of the bad things, like being away from home and what it does to your body after a certain amount of time and he kept going over just the rugged parts of the business, which made me more infatuated because I think that he was trying to convince me that this is really not

what young ladies should do. So after the breakfast was finally finished, he sat there for about ten minutes just staring at me, and just staring at me. I'm sitting there thinking, "Did I say something wrong? Have I not convinced him? What in the hell do I have to do to convince this man this is what I want? If he doesn't give it to me, I'll find it somewhere else." So after about ten to fifteen minutes, he looked at me and he said, "Now Sherri, are you sure? Have you thought this out?" And I said yeah. And he said, "It's going to be a lot of hard work and it's not going to be easy. The working conditions aren't that easy for a woman. You're always going to be a woman in a male dominated business." Well that didn't bother me too much, and I said okay. And he said okay. So after that he went and called Moolah, Lilian Ellison, and her camp was in Columbia, South Carolina. I was sent to go there about two months later. That was probably in '80.

Clark: Was it tough for you being a woman trying to break into what was thought to be a male's business?

Martel: Well, the first thing I did before I even went to Grizzly Smith was, I was living in Memphis, Tennessee, and I had two roommates-- we were kind of like *Three's Company*--they were Diane and Bobby. Bobby was a wrestler also, and we kind of had a little thing going there. And one day I sat him down and I told him about what I wanted to do. This is probably the latter part of '78 going into '79. He would get me down and put me in figure-fours and different holds. I had no idea what he was doing. He would hurt me and he would try to discourage me in that way. But that didn't discourage me. He made me promise and swear that I would not try to get in the business, that I would forget about it. He said, "You can do something else. You go back to beauty school, get your license, have your nice salon. Do things that girls are supposed to do." I said, "To hell with that. This is what I want to do." But I told him I wouldn't do it. So I went behind his back for about six months and I went to this school in Memphis, Tennessee where I got a basic idea of what I was up against. It was Butch Moore's wrestling school. I probably was there for about a year. After that, that's when I went and made my pitch to Grizzly Smith, and he in turn sent me to Moolah, where I got polished up. I was sent to Japan in January and February of '81 for eight weeks. I was basically new, still going through a lot of stuff. I had just been through a rigorous workout getting ready to go to Japan and being polished by Moolah and the other girls that I was there with at the time. It was a great big fantasy world, it was like a fantasy come true. I've always known in the back of my mind it was a male dominated business, but also knew that there was a place for women there also. So that didn't discourage me too much. And as soon as everybody realized that I was there for business and not to be their entertainment, so to speak--like everybody picks on the new person in the group--but after they realized that I was very serious about my job and what I wanted to do, they began to help me out a little bit more. I had lots of help from lots of guys. Frank (Bruiser) Brody was one of them, who was one of my dearest friends--I knew him since I was sixteen years old--Stan Hansen, and right before he died, I had the best compliment that anybody's ever given me in my life from Buddy Rogers. I have a picture with him and Ric Flair at the convention in New York at the Ramada that I wouldn't take a million dollars for. He told me that I was the best in the game today, and he wrote that on my picture. That's a hell of a compliment coming from a man from his era. I think he was absolutely fabulous.

Clark: Were there ever any situations or problems when you were breaking into the business or later on, where you were held back because you were a woman?

Martel: No, not really. You know men are going to be men, and they tease you a little bit and everything. But once they figured out that I wasn't there for their entertainment and that I was there to work, you have to get to the point where you have to stand on your own two feet. The only thing I've ever wanted in this business was a dressing room where I could go to the bathroom in privacy and take a shower when I finish working. As soon as the guys figured out that I wasn't going to be anything more than business--it came pretty much down to guys and girls, and eventually it got to where I was kind of like everybody's little sister. And I was always there for them to talk when they needed a feminine point of view or if they had problems. I tried to always be there and be considerate of them. As time went on year after year, they gave me the same. Respect is not given, it has to be earned.

Clark: How would you describe your years in the AWA and what kind of an experience was it for you?

Martel: I was living in Nashville at the time. I think it was in 1984. I had worked for the Memphis territory after I got back from another tour in Japan. I flew back up to Minneapolis and Larry Zbyszko met me there. He took me over to the office. Larry and I went in and we talked to Greg Gagne. They were looking for a manager, and so they asked me if I would be willing to relocate. And I said sure. They gave me a starting date there and told me I was going to manage Buddy Rose and Doug Somers. In the beginning part of my career I had managed Buddy. I was one of his first rose buds with Vince Sr. It (AWA) was really hard for a while because it was my first time actually working in a territory where I was working on my own. I wasn't under Moolah or anyone else, so I was kind of on my own. And it really felt good and I felt like I was really accomplishing a lot. They were some of the greatest times of my life up there. Kathy Gagne and Larry Zbyszko are married now and

have two babies. Kathy was always one of my best friends. The road up there was great because you got to be home a lot more. Comparing it to the rigorous schedule that I had with Vince, hell, that seems like candy now. I had lots of good years there. I learned a lot from Verne Gagne and everybody there that I worked with. There was Scott Hall, who is now Razor Ramon, and Colonel DeBeers, Buddy and Doug. The Rockers, who would have ever thought that I would be working with Marty and Shawn at the time when I was working there? Because at that point in my career, I was going to be a bad girl forever and ever. I never wanted to be a good girl.

Clark: When were you the happiest in your career in wrestling?

Martel: My most happiest time in the wrestling business came July 15, 1993, when I was released and I got my life back. So I can quit living out of a suitcase now. And I actually have a bedroom, I can't believe it. I had costumes all over the place, so now I've got all those tucked away. But if you're talking about wrestling, it was each and every Wrestlemania that I was in and in the two years that I worked with Randy Savage and Hulk Hogan. That will probably be my most memorable, happiest time that I ever had.

Clark: After working for and dealing with Vince McMahon for about the past six years, what are your personal feelings on him as a businessman and as a person?

Martel: Vince is no different than any other businessman. For six years I worked for him. It's the only job that I've ever had in my life where I didn't have to worry about sexual harassment. It was a very rigorous schedule, but he is a businessman and I worked for him, so therefore I did my job to my fullest potential. I hope that he also thinks so because we split on really good terms. So everything's pretty cool with me and them up there. But I think he's an excellent businessman. I'm talking from a talent point of view so I can't really give you any insight on anything in the office. As far as everything goes, he runs a very tight ship and he demands perfection from his people that work for him. But like I said, there was never a birthday that went by or a Christmas that I didn't get a birthday or Christmas card from him and his family. He was good to me for six years, and I'm going to miss him. There's maybe a possibility in the future where I may go back, but at this point in time right now I'd kind of like to just worry about staying off the road. But then again, Vince knew that I was kind of getting burnt out and everything, so it really came as no surprise to me (her release from the company). But six years for a woman in the same place is a very long time in this business, you have to consider. I think I had the longest run there than any woman that's been anywhere.

Clark: Were there ever times where Vince reached out to you as a human being and not necessarily as just an employee, to help you out?

Martel: Yeah. About three years ago, I caught pneumococcal pneumonia. That was the same thing that killed Jim Henson. We were in Rochester or Syracuse, New York, and I had stayed back at the hotel. I couldn't get out of bed. The pneumonia that I had, my blood wasn't building. My muscles were starting to grow up in all my limbs and it felt like I was having labor pains in my legs, and I could hardly walk. Randy had driven me from the town the night before to a place less than 60 miles from Rochester. I was going to do my damndest to go on. I was working with Randy, and Randy came out and saw me as white as a sheep. I was getting the makeup job on and Randy looked at me, he said, "You can't go out there like this. You're sick, you need to go to the hospital." I just started crying and everything just seemed to cave in on me. Randy called Vince up there. And he said, "Sherri, what's wrong?" And I said, "I don't know. I feel like I'm having a baby in my legs. I'm tired, I can't eat nothing. I can't keep anything in my stomach. I'm throwing up, nothing there." He said, "You're going to the hospital." So they carried me back down to my dressing room and let me lay down because the cramps were becoming a lot more frequent now and my breathing was getting harder. They took me to the Genesee Hospital in Rochester, New York, and they did all kinds of blood work on me. They told me that I had probably maybe two inches more room left in my lungs to breathe because my lungs were filling up with fluid. So they admitted me and they told me that all the potassium in my body was almost gone. They made me drink pure potassium. They told me that my blood wasn't rebuilding itself, the white blood cells weren't rebuilding. So they put me in a private room and I had all kinds of tubes coming out of me and they put me on this oxygen thing. I don't remember much after they told me they were going to admit me. I think I kind of passed out. I was in my room and I woke up and I turned my head, and Vince McMahon and Pat Patterson were there standing beside my bed. I looked up at him, I said, "Hey, toots." That was kind of a nickname I had for him. I said, "Pat, what are you guys doing here? You're supposed to be on the way to the next town?" And he said, "We had to come and check and see how you were." And I said, "Well, that was awful nice of you." So they stayed a few more minutes. He smiled at me, and he and Pat both kind of took my hand. And it was really nice because I realized that he did care about the people that worked for him and he took it out of his time to come and see me and see how I was doing. Over the next couple of days there were flowers coming in from the office. Randy and Liz at that time were still married, I had flowers from them. It's one of the most memorable things that I'll have with Vince. Nobody can take that away from me. People can say what they want, but Vince McMahon's got as big a heart as anybody else and he's just as vulnerable as anybody else, and he's just as

caring. He was a very wonderful man to me for six years, a wonderful boss, somebody that taught me a whole lot. It's just one of those things I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

Clark: How has your attitudes towards life and the pro wrestling business changed after working for the WWF for six years?

Martel: I'm looking at it very optimistically. I'm very eager to start a second phase of my life and another career, a totally different career. I've learned a lot from being on the road for so long but it's time for me now, there comes a point in time in everybody's life where they have to say, "Look, you have to get your s--t together. It's time to stop being a gypsy." That time came within the last nine months for me. Actually, it was about the last year and a half that I had been thinking about it. Vince was aware of my feelings. As was I of his, because he was coming to a point where he couldn't do anything more with me and I was getting to the point to where I couldn't stand living on the road anymore. I kind of drove everybody crazy and everybody thought I had PMS 24 hours a day. But I'm looking forward to just staying at home. I'm going to do some personal appearances. I'm going to take care of my aquariums and spend some time with my animals, and get re-acquainted with my family. I'm going to try to set up a normal life here and try to get back into the swing of just being a regular citizen again, instead of being a gypsy for so long.

Clark: Was there ever a point in your career where you were kind of living a fantasy life or thought you were?

Martel: No, it was never a fantasy life. It was a career that I knew was limited and would not last forever. So I always kept my perspectives in the right place. Nothing involved in the entertainment world or things like that last forever, because a woman's body just can't take it, to be honest. I've got my suitcases over there, I've got all my wrestling gear packed up, I've got my boots packed up, and I'm clearing all of that out of here. It was fun while it lasted and I accomplished many, many things that I'm very proud of, but you can't dwell on the past either. Goals are made for things in the future and things that you can dedicate yourself to. I finished up what I set out to do as far as the wrestling business goes and I wouldn't trade anything for not one day of it. But it's time now for me to get on to something hopefully bigger and better.

Clark: During your six years with the WWF, how did your level of enthusiasm, interest, and motivation change during that time?

Martel: The motivation itself wasn't the work. The only thing that really got to me was the travelling all the time because it's very strenuous on your body and it has its way of aging you far before your time. My motivation came when it was time to go to work. I knew that when I went out there that I had to give those people 150% because they had paid their hard earned dollars to buy the tickets. Let's face it, wrestling tickets these days are about as much as concert tickets are. And I wanted those people out there to be happy that they came out there, no matter if they booed, hissed, and said all kinds of stuff to me. That was their way of getting rid of any type of anxieties and in turn I got rid of a lot of my anxieties by agitating them, which is what I was there for. It was just one of those times, there's not anyone out there that I truly hated or anything like that. But you know what really bothered me more than anything? Is that I'd see these little kids sitting ringside when I was a bad guy, and when I would go out there—I was brought up in a Baptist background, and so my thing is "yes, mam" and "no, mam," "yes, sir" and "no, sir," "thank you," "no thank you" and "have a good evening," and "thank you for calling, and this, that, and the other—but these little kids were out there calling me c--t, slut, whore, and all kinds of stuff. And this is coming out of the mouths of eight, nine, ten year olds, some of them younger. And what was really crazy was that the parents were sitting there just smiling and saying, "Well, isn't he cute? You hear what he said? He called her a bitch!" It just really makes me wonder what's happening with the parents' values that they're bringing their kids up with these days. With a lot of the stuff that's coming on, the way the world is, it doesn't surprise me, but I just kind of wonder what happened to old-fashion values.

Clark: Do you think the wrestling product today influences that kind of behavior from children and people in general at all?

Martel: I'll tell you what, you see a lot more in movies with violence and things like that as opposed to what you see in wrestling. You have to keep wrestling in its proper perspective. Wrestling is wrestling entertainment. It's entertainment, which means that you go out there and you enjoy yourself. And basically everybody knows what's going on anyway. You just go out there and you have to keep it in its proper perspective. Again, that just leads me back to where, why are the kids being brought up this way? That had a lot to do with me thinking about my career too because when I was a bad guy my son had lots of really, really negative peer pressure in school. And I didn't actually realize until the last three years what my career was doing to him as far as the peer pressure. My son, he just turned fifteen yesterday, he had lots and lots of problems with being peer pressured. It's gotten a little bit better after I turned good guy. The kids, they can be very terrible to each other without really meaning to be, but they're very honest because their minds aren't really

screwed up by everything. I think if people would take more time and select what kids watch and if moviemakers would take a little bit more time and see that movies sell other than violence and sex. I know that's contradictory to my character the whole time I've been in the business but I just have a hard time comprehending why parents let their kids do stuff like that. I think that's probably the only thing that really bothered me in the business—I'd see these young kids out there and then I'd see the parents doing the same. I know where they get it from, because the parents are doing the same thing. And I don't think that they should serve alcoholic beverages at the shows because alcohol gives a person a certain amount of liquid courage, which is not very good. And people aren't always on their best behavior when they're intoxicated either.

Clark: Were there ever times where a fan would get really out of control and say nasty things to you that caused you to become really upset or stirred up your emotions?

Martel: There were a couple of times in Philly where this guy was really aggravating me. He was starting to use four letter words and bad words so I wouldn't even start the show. I got the security guard and I pointed him out. The security guard heard him, and fortunately the security in Philly is one of the best anywhere. The guy was slurring vulgarly all over the place when there were children around this ring. I had enough things to deal with other than this guy throwing all kinds of stuff around. I told the security guard I've got a fifteen year old at home and that I don't even bring him to the shows anymore because of people like this.

Clark: But you were always able to separate it from your emotions?

Martel: Oh, yeah. One of the things I learned early on was to never lose control at ringside. Never, ever lose control. You can't do that (let your emotions come into it). You can save it for the dressing room. You can go back there and cry if it bothers you. I think you should never lose your control of any situation.

Clark: Do you feel the main reason the feud with you and Luna Vachon was promoted was because they wanted to display a good women's match with good athletics and competition or because they basically wanted to sell a T&A deal?

Martel: I think the motive behind it was it was time for me, my time was almost up, and so they needed another girl. And Luna Vachon came in. She's very athletic, she's very young, she's very ninety-ish. Her and Bam Bam Bigelow actually are going to make a really good team, I think. It's a little bit of T&A, but that's in anything. Regardless of what you do, there's going to be T&A. I think she's really going to be good. After six years, everybody looking at me, it's about time for a change anyway.

Clark: Do you have any reservations today about the angles they did with you and The Ultimate Warrior such as the thing at Madison Square Garden where he was literally ripping your clothes off and night after night he was press slamming you and beating you up?

Martel: Ah, no. My body feels it now. At the time, it was business and I did what I had to do. I always tried to keep as well covered as I possibly could in case something of that nature did happen, which happened when it did constantly happen. But I always tried to make sure that I imagined my son was sitting out there and just to do my best, and that I was trying to take care of his college fund and pay for my mom's place. All of those things took priority over me getting my clothes ripped off. Sure, a couple of times there it came kind of close, but I'd like to think that everything was fully covered. Hell, they've seen less on the beach than what I wore.

Clark: So you look at those things as just part of the job?

Martel: Yeah, yeah. That goes back to getting your priorities and everything in the right place. Isn't that what we all do a job for?

Clark: What basically made you decide to leave the WWF?

Martel: Number one—it was their choice along with my choice. I'd been there six good years, but it was time for me to come off the road. I feel the need for a change in my life, to do something else. Instead of beating my body up, now I want to use my brains and my hands, which have been out of whack for a little while. That way I won't hurt my body, and hopefully I can have a successful beauty salon. I was supposed to leave after SummerSlam but I'm actually glad and I was actually hoping that they would decide to give me an earlier release.

Clark: What situation or role were you most comfortable in and most happy with—managing Randy Savage, Shawn Michaels, or Ted DiBiase?

Martel: All three, each and everyone of them are great. They're great guys and I felt privileged to work for them. Ted never struck me as the type of person that needed a manager. It kind of added to it there for awhile after the Virgil thing went off, so that kept me going. That was kind of like an undershot in the arm too. But I became very, very comfortable working with Randy Savage because he's the type of man,

during our interviews, where we did all the wild stuff and everything, he's the type of person that makes you want to bring out the best in yourself that you possibly can. He and his wife helped me through a really, really bad time with my ex-husband. They kept me from having a nervous breakdown because I went through a really, really bad marriage and I about lost everything that I had because of him. But Randy was there for me. Anytime I needed somebody to talk to he was there, and Liz at the time was also. It was very saddening for me when I heard about their separation and divorce because when I first started working with Randy and everything was going really good—my income was really good and I had a great partner to work with—but I went a little bit overboard there because I wanted everything. I wanted my cake and I wanted to eat it too. I wanted my career and I wanted a home life also, which made me a little bit vulnerable. So I met this guy, my ex-husband, and I wanted a relationship like Randy and Liz's, but I forgot that that type of relationship takes a long time. And he was pretty much a gold-digger. If my mom could see him right now she'd blow his head off. And so would anybody else in my family. And a few other people that I know of too. I think that was my most memorable time, being in Europe with Randy and Liz and working with Hogan.

Clark: Was there anybody else that they wanted to put you with or was there anybody else you wanted to manage?

Martel: I always wanted to manage The Nasty Boys because they were always funny, they're always so up, and they've always had such good attitudes and everything. I just talked to Brian the other day and I just found out that Missy Hyatt is starting as their new manager. I think they'll make a great trio. Before, I had heard, this is just hearsay, they were going to try to put me with Davey Boy Smith. And then Davey Boy took the option to get his contract released. After that had happened, this was around the time where Shawn and I were fixing to do the big break off, Pat Patterson asked me at TV if I could still wrestle. And I said, "Sure, I can still wrestle." So I knew at that point that they were going to bring another girl in. But who it was, I just had to find out. So I talked to Vince, "Look here toots, Pat asked me if I could wrestle again. I told him yes. And if you're going to bring another girl in, I'd like to know who it is so I can do some background work on it." And he said, "Well, I'm not sure yet." I said, "Yes, you do know. You can't tell me you don't know. You know everything six months to a year ahead of time." So he said, "We want somebody that's more outrageous than you are." So I said, "Who do you have in mind?" And he said Luna Vachon. I had spent six weeks with Luna Vachon in Japan in 1986. I yelled and screamed, I was so happy. I kind of got the feeling at that point, even though they hadn't said anything, that she would be the one carrying the baton after I left. It's kind of like a woman's intuition thing.

Clark: After you stopped wrestling full-time in the WWF and became a manager, do you think the fans perception of you changed at all?

Martel: You've got your die-hard wrestling fans and then you've got the people that just want to see you out there. The die-hard wrestling fans wanted me to start back wrestling again. Of course, women's wrestling has been gone for so long, and I think they were really kind of happy when it came back. And unfortunately, I wasn't willing to put my body through all of the last thirteen years all over again. But if there's going to be somebody taking my place, I'm glad that it was Angel Vachon. I really am. I wish her nothing but the best. And I hope she has as successful six years or if not more as I did.

Clark: What's your relationship with her today?

Martel: I wish her nothing but the best. There's a time to go to work and there's a time to stop. Angel has two children and she comes from a phenomenal wrestling family. I think she's going to be really good for the business, and I think she's going to be good for the WWF. I think her children, her mom and her dad are going to be really proud of her.

Clark: Did you object to being turned babyface and was it difficult for you to adjust to that role?

Martel: Yeah, it was because the first six months that I was at Moolah's I was a babyface there. I was babyface then because she always said I had a cute face, which I couldn't figure out what she was talking about because I always wanted to paint up and everything. I always wanted to get on a little something extra. She said no, no, no. But then we were in Columbia, South Carolina working on a show there for Crockett at the time. I was a heel that night, and I've been a heel ever since. But I had no objections to turning babyface when they finally did turn me, as long as it was done in the right way, and it was captivating to the fans. It did the most for Shawn, who did it, and it did a hell of a thing for Marty, and so it actually benefitted everybody all the way around.

Clark: Why do you think Elizabeth was able to become so popular as a character without her actually saying very much?

Martel: Mostly because it was always Randy Savage's persona in the ring and everybody loved Randy for so long, and then Elizabeth just became a natural part of

that. You know, when you saw one, you saw the other. She's always so gentle and so fragile looking. She was always there by Randy's side, good or bad, it never mattered. And I think that's why the public took to her so easily. She was kind of like what a lot of women want to do—stand by the person that they really love and care about. When her and Randy were married, I remember the look in her eyes and the look in his eyes. And I envied that, and I think that's what got me on the wrong track and into that marriage that wasn't so good. But Elizabeth will never be forgotten. She'll have her own space in time forever.

Clark: I've talked to many wrestlers before who've said, "Boy, Sherri was the hardest working person on the card tonight." I mean, do you take a lot of pride in the hard work that you did out there and that you became one of the best managers in the business?

Martel: Yes, but that was my ultimate goal. I've always wanted to be the best at anything. My mom always told me and all my friends always told me that in order to be successful, you've got to do your best and put your best out there and give of yourself. You've got to give not 110%, but 150%, if not more. It was important to me, because it never left my mind also that I was in a male dominated business. And God, look at the people that I had to work with. I had to get out there and give it everything I had. I mean, some of the most famous names in this business were out there that I had to work beside. I looked at it as I had to come up to their par. I had to come up to their level where I wanted to be good enough to work beside them, where I would compliment the match and not take anything away from it.

Clark: How do you think Sensational Sherri was able to become a good drawing power on her own?

Martel: I think it was because of the hard work and I think it was because of the television time. Vince McMahon has a way of putting you across on the screen and it makes the fans more curious about you, and makes them want to come to see you—more curiosity to, "God, is she really that nasty? God, is she really that mean? God, how could anybody stand to be around her?" While I was working with Vince we weren't allowed to actually talk to anybody outside of his press and his magazine. So I kind of kept pretty quiet anyway. I wasn't ever one to really try to get in the limelight but while I was there I made sure my presence was known because that was my job.

Clark: What kind of image do you think you have towards the public?

Martel: A professional one, I hope (laughs). I can understand why there would be some negativity there, as far as my characters. But with the intelligence of the human race, I hope that they're able to see through my characters. Working with the WWF, they don't like the person themselves portraying the character to really get acquainted with the public that much. That keeps the mystery in the character. It keeps people interested, I think. Which is nothing bad on them, that's the way they want things, and that's fine. But everybody has to realize just because that person is on TV portraying a character doesn't necessarily mean that that's how they are in person. And people have to bear that in mind. A lot of people can't separate fantasy from reality. And I've always really tried to do that, and that's why I've been able to pretty much keep my feet on the ground and not get caught up in all the glamour and glory, so to speak. I enjoyed it while it was there and it was fun, but also I knew where I came from. When I would come back home I had no problems putting on tennis shoes and a pair of jeans and pushing a lawnmower, mowing the lawn.

Clark: Do you like the way they're portraying Boni Blackstone's character on television?

Martel: I don't know too much about Boni Blackstone. I'll tell you who I'd rather see in her place, Mike McGuirk. Because in my opinion Mike McGuirk has a better persona in front of the TV camera and when she talks to the wrestlers, she gets the point across. An interviewer that's out there like Boni is doing, her job is to make these guys look good, not just sit there and drool. Another thing that I don't particularly care about her is that she doesn't wear a bra, which is very obvious when you watch TV. But I just think Mike McGuirk would have been a much better choice. But then again, that's only my personal opinion. I was in the dressing room a few times with Boni, and she's a nice person. I've got nothing against her. But as far as professionally speaking, I think Mike McGuirk would have made a much better interviewer. I wish she would do more, as far as interviews goes, because she can pull off an interview like you wouldn't believe. And she comes from a wrestling background also. She's actually got an edge over Boni Blackstone. Plus, she's been around a lot longer.

Clark: For the most part, how do you feel the few women that are left in the business get over with public?

Martel: I think with them getting over, the women can only go out there and do so much. It's the promoter's job to promote them and everything. The women can get out there and do their job, but when it comes to them getting over, I think that's really in what kind of publicity that they get, what kind of promotions that the

promoters are doing. I think that it's really terrible that some of the promoters aren't using more women. Granted, there aren't that many left. But the ones that are still out there, they're still doing independents and they're still just as good as they were.

Clark: Are you sad to see that women's wrestling has basically been eliminated here in America?

Martel: Yeah, it's actually like a dying breed. It's like another form of our business is being pushed in the back. If I would have known years ago, I wouldn't change anything. But I guess there's some women that don't actually realize what it takes to be in this business and what kind of punishment that your body takes. Let's face it, a woman's body is definitely not meant to beat on. It's really hard out there, and I really think that the GLOW girls hurt us a lot because, in my opinion, they weren't wrestlers, they just took a bunch of tapes of "How To's" and this and that. And that was a little bit more T&A than anything else, thank you Jackie Stallone. But you can't take somebody that's just watched a tape and doesn't have any experience in a ring. Without ring psychology, you can't expect her to get out there and give you a quality match. There aren't very many women left around today that can do that because there's nobody to teach them anywhere.

Clark: Did you have any desire at all to work over in Japan after you were set to leave the WWF this year?

Martel: I'm thinking about maybe going over there. I'm going to call the Inoki and Baba offices and see if they're going to be interested in having a female manager. But like I said, that would only be like for maybe a couple of weeks or something like that. I don't really want to be gone from home a whole lot anymore. But Japan's always been really good to me. One of the last times when I was over there Brody was there too, and so I have really fond memories of that. I'm going to do a lot of things but I don't really want to get back into wrestling now. I think my wrestling time itself has passed.

Clark: Did you suffer any severe injuries in your career, and do you feel the effects of any of them today?

Martel: I was really fortunate for thirteen years because the only thing I had was two dislocated legs. As far as for anything really permanent, just regular aches and tendonitis and stuff like that. The only thing really bad that ever happened to me was that pneumonia that I had and that kept me in the hospital for two weeks. In early '83 I was in a mixed men's and women's battle royal in Jackson, Tennessee, and I was working for the Jarrett Promotions. I did something really stupid and I lost my balance, and I went down. And Uncle Elmer, Stan Frazier, fell on my leg and it dislocated it, and for a long time I had to wear a brace up to my thigh. That was pretty painful. The doctors wanted to operate and Moolah said, "Don't let them operate. It's a minor injury and it will be okay." I took that advice. It carried through, but it still goes out on me every now and then. But that happens when you're working in such a physical contact sport. The other one was when Marty Janetty hit me over the head with the mirror. Some of the fragments of the glass went in my eyes.

Clark: For the most part, do you feel male wrestlers, promoters, and fans in this country respect women in the wrestling business, or do you think some of the things like GLOW hurt their image?

Martel: I think that hurt the GLOW girls, all the girls that were connected with that particular business. There are a few girls out there that still have that respect, but it took them a lot of years to earn. You have to earn their respect, it's not something that's usually given.

Clark: What are your personal feelings on the character Missy Hyatt portrays?

Martel: I think Missy portrays her character well. She does what she has to do to get the character over and to give the fans what they want. She's very particular in everything that she does. I know that because I know her. But she does everything to the best of her professional ability, I believe. Each and every character for a woman I think has to come from inside them and they have to build on that. And Missy has a lot of confidence in herself, as does Angel. Hell, there's no extent to where you can take her. You can put her in just about any type of situation and she could work her way out of it.

Clark: What are your personal opinions of Madusa Miceli?

Martel: Don't have any. I have nothing to say about her.

Clark: Jim Cornette was your first manager when you started in wrestling. I was wondering what it was like for you to work with him and what you personally think of him?

Martel: I think Jim Cornette is one of the most wonderful and talented men that I've ever met. He was a photographer when he first started out in the business and he

worked his way up just like any professional would. He became wonderful at his job and his persona in front of people, and what he can do with a crowd is just exceptional. I would do just about anything in the world for Jim Cornette. I really value his friendship and I feel very privileged to call him my friend.

Clark: How has being in the wrestling business for thirteen years effected your personal life, such as your marriages, your relationship with your son, and relationships with friends?

Martel: My personal life for thirteen years was the s---s. I've been married three times. It was ten years in between my second and third marriage, and my last marriage was a divorce. My son is by my second ex-husband. People looked at me as Sensational Sherri or Sensational Queen Sherri instead of being Sherri. For a long, long time though I've been able to keep my personality separate so when I'm at home everybody just treats me like Sherri. And when I'm on the road, I'm Sensational Sherri. It's kind of hard when you're in front of the fans, you kind of have to keep up that. Not to the point where you're rude or anything, but it's just a part of you that you have to keep private. Like I've got kids coming by here all the time, which I don't mind. They see my Blazer outside so they'll know that I'm home. And they'll yell out when I'm sitting out on the deck. And the kids, they're our next generation. They're the ones that are going to be running our country. So I always try to put forth a good attitude to everybody regardless of whether I was a heel or a babyface in the business. I tried never to be mean to be kids because I know how that can be. My son had to go through a really difficult period because he seemed to think just because I was on TV and anything else that I was made out of money and that he could have anything he wanted because his mom was Sensational Sherri. Well, that's where all the BS stopped. He sat down and got a really, really quick attitude adjustment. For his birthday he wanted me to get him a dirt bike. I told him absolutely not. My son is like 6'2" and 240 pounds. He just turned fifteen yesterday. Since I was in the wrestling business I was able to see him probably two or three times a year. But now, since I'm out, I'm planning on him spending next summer with me. He told me he is going to be with his dad this year on Christmas.

Clark: Is catching up on time with him one of the things that you're most looking forward to now that you're basically out of wrestling?

Martel: Yeah, because it's like I messed up on it and missed out on him growing up because I was on the road. There are so many things that I missed out on. But now I can catch up on it. I realize that they're not going to be the same as it was before, but I can deal with that. Nothing is the same, it changes day to day. The only thing that I regret is that I lost a lot of time with him. He actually got to know Sensational Sherri before he actually got to know Mom. It's really hard for someone to comprehend what you're like when they're only with you probably six weeks of the year and from just talking to them on the phone.

Clark: Were you ever ashamed or upset about the role you were playing in the wrestling business?

Martel: Only when it had a negative effect on my son. That's the only time. He started having really bad problems at school because of my character. This starting happening about a year and a half, two years ago. When everybody found out that I was his mother, it was starting to have a negative effect on him. I just knew something had to change somewhere. Last year when we were in Canada, I told Vince what was going on and that my son was going through a really difficult time. But the teen years are just a terrible time for children. You really need to be there because peer pressure at school is one of the hardest things that they're facing now, and people offering them drugs, and kids carrying guns to school. It's just outrageously terrifying because all these kids are there, and my son's there, and look at what I'm doing. I'm just egging him on and egging him on. That's about the only thing that ever really worried me about my roles. He's happy that I'm out. He's excited that I'm going to get a beauty salon because he's thinking about the girls coming over, and he can watch the girls and stuff like that. He's quite a young man. He lives in Morgan City, Louisiana with his daddy. His name is Jared.

Clark: Do you think your job caused problems with your marriages?

Martel: In any relationship, it's something that takes time to build. All three of my marriages were spontaneous. I was probably married to my second husband, Jared's father, three and a half years. That was longer than I've ever had a relationship with anyone. Don't ask me why. (laughs) The people that are in the wrestling business are kind of like gypsies. And the people that are their spouses, it takes somebody really strong to be behind someone that's never there. My second husband, his name is LeRoy, it was hard for him. He knew what I wanted to do but he couldn't comprehend living out of suitcase. So when we divorced, he was rewarded custody of Jared. And I didn't contest the divorce because I wanted Jared to have a stable home also, but I knew at the time that I was not stable enough to give him that. And the things that I wanted to give him, if I'd just stayed there and been a mother, I never would have been able to give them to him. But everything's worked out. My ex-husband is remarried to a lady—I couldn't have found a better person than Pat. We get along and she's just a great person. She really loves Jared. There's times that

she's been there for him when I couldn't be or that I chose not to be because of my profession.

Clark: Could you describe yourself as a person?

Martel: I'm a very outgoing person. (laughs) It's crazy, I like to see people smile. I'm not really demanding in a lot of areas. I'm very demanding in honesty because I think if you tell one small lie, then you've got to back it up by a few more, and sooner or later, all of them are going to start piling up on you. I couldn't remember telling so many lies anyway. I'm outgoing, I like to do things outside. I'm very compassionate. I work with a lot of kids with a kids hospital here in Birmingham. I like being around people older than I am because I feel that I can learn from them. When I told you that I had my nurse's aide license, that was one of the best things. I liked working in a nursing home because I met these people that were born in the late 1800s, before the turn of 1900, and they could remember not ever having cars, and they got around by horse and buggy. That always fascinated me and I always enjoyed being around people that I could learn from. I think I'm really demanding of myself. I don't ask anything of anybody else that I don't ask of myself or that I wouldn't do or can't do myself. (laughs) It's hard to make a self-analysis. I value honesty within my friendships. You can't have any kind of relationship with anyone without being honest in there because if you have the type of relationship where you have to lie someone, then that's not friendship. I'm the type of person, I'll believe someone and I'll befriend them, and until they screw me over or they lie to me, I'm their friend for life. I don't go by what other people say about people. I treat a person the way that they treat me. I like to treat people the way I like to be treated. I think it's important. Also, what goes around, comes around. If you're being deceitful and not honest with everybody, that's what's going to come back to you. People can see through that kind of thing.

Clark: How would you describe the relationship you have with your mother? Are you like best friends?

Martel: Yeah. There's not a subject on the face of the earth that I can't talk with my mother about. Not one subject in the world. I can talk to my mom about anything. I moved back home and it's kind of nice to be here with her because she's kind of like getting to know me and I'm getting to do a lot of things around the house that I haven't been able to. She gives me my privacy. She's never, ever been one to say, "Well, I told you so," and she's never been one to butt in. She's always let me make my decisions, regardless of whether they're right or wrong, because she feels the only way I'm going to learn something is if I experience it for myself. And because I'm hardheaded too. If somebody told me something can't be done, I'd say, "Well, why not?" "Well, you can't do something." I say watch me. I've just always been like that—real hardheaded. I get it from her.

Clark: Did your mother really influence you to get into wrestling?

Martel: She was actually the one who initiated me getting interested in it. She had the initial combination there, bringing us together, and then it just took off from there. I said, "Hell, if I could be a clown and paint my face and go out and make people happy, I could get into some other type of entertainment." And, boy, did I do it! My mom said, "Whatever you want to do, do it. But do it with everything you've got, be honest, and work your hardest." Because somebody can never condemn me for that. She's all I got, besides my son. But each and everyone of us only has one mother and father, and she's all I got because I never met my father.

Clark: Do you think growing up without a father has effected you?

Martel: I think that may have to do with some of the decisions on bad marriages. Without having a father figure around to warn me against these things or to give me advice where my mom let me make my own decisions. Maybe it could have but I'm really not sure because it was never there to begin with. But that's why when I got a divorce from my ex-husband, I realized what it was like for me growing up without a father, amidst having a little boy, and I knew that he could be a better parent at that point in time than I could. I couldn't give him the stability and the things a little boy needs while growing up. It was painful and probably selfish, but I made the decision that I thought was best for him at the time. As I do each and every time.

Clark: Did you marry very young? And do you think not having a father had anything to do with that?

Martel: The first time I was 16, the next time I was 19, and I was 32. Maybe so, that could have been it. But I wanted to get out. I was always real gung ho on getting out of the house and getting away. I was always a rebel. I still am, but it's just calmed down to a more mature nature now. But that could have had a lot to do with it, I think. But I wanted to see everything I could see, I wanted to see what was in the world, and I wanted to see everybody that I could see in the world, and what kind of people were every place in the world. As far as I was concerned, there wasn't anything or nobody that was going to stop me.

Clark: Going back to wrestling, who are some of the people that you admired or

looked up to in the wrestling business, or formed friendships with?

Martel: Frank Brody was a friend of mine for 16 years. I saw him three to six months prior to his death in Puerto Rico. I knew him for a long, long time. He was, in a sense, a father figure to me. When I first met him in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, I was probably 15, 16. All the other wrestlers were just reading regular magazines and everything, but he always carried around a Wall Street Journal. That always struck me as something different. I said, "This man has some brains, maybe I can learn something from him." But in turn trying to learn from him, we formed a friendship, which lasted up until that thing happened in Puerto Rico. I won't work in Puerto Rico. I turned down a job to go to Puerto Rico because one of the buildings where the shows would be was where he was killed. Again, out of respect, because the guy that killed him is still running around. The thought of that wonderful man's wife and beautiful little boy growing up without a father, it depresses me. It's a very terrible thing, and I really don't want anything to do with those people. I never really had any desire whatsoever to go to Puerto Rico anyway, so that just topped it off. Buddy Rogers, because he was wonderful and gave me the best compliment I ever had from anyone in this business. Ric Flair, he'll have a place in my heart forever and ever. Hulk Hogan, I've known him probably 12, 13 years. I met Hogan when he was Terry Bollea, and Eddie Bollea (Brutus Beefcake), they were the Boulder Brothers from Memphis, Tennessee. This is around the time right before I started in the wrestling school. Hogan's always been a friend, a work associate. I think that he's brought wrestling to a plateau, where it never was before, and I don't think it will ever really get that far again. There will never be another Hulk Hogan.

Clark: How was it to work with him?

Martel: It was a very nice, warm atmosphere anytime you were around him. He has this thing about him, you can relax. I was really nervous at first. He said, "Come on, lighten up." I sat back and I watched him in the AWA, and I saw how quickly he caught on. I always knew that he was going to be someone great, I really did. You could just tell from being around him, and he has a wonderful business sense and is an exceptionally wonderful father and husband to his wife and children. His parents, Ruth and Pete, they're wonderful. His biggest love is his children, I think. He'll always have a place in my heart also. I must have an awful big heart because I sure do have a lot of people in it.

Clark: Is there anyone else who you admired or looked up to?

Martel: Andre the Giant. On my first trip to France with Andre I went out drinking the night before. I was in a hotel and I missed my wake-up call. Andre hated to wait on anybody. He hated it. Boy, he came up there and he said, "Get your ass up and out of bed. You're making everybody wait on you. You didn't even get your wake-up call, you're phone's off the hook. Either you drink and go out with the boys or you keep it strictly business and don't drink. You cannot do a job and drink also. You choose one of the two. Now, get your ass up." At the time I don't think it sank in just how important my job actually was. He didn't talk to me for like two weeks. But what he said sunk in because I realized how much I had riding on me. My job was very important, and I didn't realize the responsibility I had taken on until that time. Sometimes it takes a little jar to get you going. I miss him. Kerry Von Erich was wonderful too. You never saw Kerry without a smile. If somebody was down, he was always trying to bring him back up. He was just great. I really, really miss him. He was real close to Mike McGuirk and Big Bossman and myself. We used to all go out all the time when we were together, which was rarely because we were always on different ends of the country. The way I'm thinking, maybe God needed Kerry up in heaven more than here.

Clark: Just like males in the wrestling business have felt a tremendous pressure to get bigger by using steroids, did you ever use steroids or do anything else to enhance yourself?

Martel: No. Do I look like I've ever taken a steroid? (laughs) Here's what I've got to say about steroids. I think the people are adults. And adults have to make their own decisions. The decisions that they make they have to live with and they have to be responsible for. I've never been what you really call a bodybuilder. I do enough to keep myself in shape. But I think whatever everybody else does is their own business. I try not to stick my nose in it, to be honest. That's how I stayed working for the WWF for six years. As long as their decisions don't effect me or my family or my job or anything, what they do in their own privacy is their business. That might seem like I'm getting out of the question, but actually it's not, I'm that way with anything. It doesn't matter whether I agree with them or not, and they could be my best friends, but some of the things they choose to do I may not approve of, but as long as it doesn't effect me, I don't care because they're the ones that are going to have to live with what they're doing.

Clark: Are you looking towards getting married again or building a family in the future?

Martel: No, I don't think so. Right now I'm still business oriented as far as getting back into school and getting my license. I'm not going to say never, because never is

a long, long time. There's not anybody in my life right now. I'm just kind of getting used to being a normal person again. It's very nice. I really missed it a lot. But I was able to accomplish a lot of things that I'm really proud of.

Clark: Do you have any regrets in your life?

Martel: I regret not finishing beauty school when I started it because I had less than 200 hours to finish. I think with all the TV and the exposure that I've had in the last 13 years and all the places that I've been, I think that will really help me as far as being a good businesswoman and being able to serve the public in a totally different manner than they're accustomed to seeing me. I regret my three marriages.

Clark: Is there anything else, just on any subject in life, that you have very strong feelings about?

Martel: I feel very strongly about life itself. I think that each and every day that goes by you should cherish it and take care of it because you never know when it's not going to be there anymore. It's just like Buddy Rogers, Kerry Von Erich, Frank Brody. I think everybody should just take care of what they have and re-evaluate when they start thinking about screwing up. I think they should cherish every moment because you never know when it's not going to be there anymore. Does that sound corny?

Clark: No, it's a good, positive attitude. I should learn a little.

Martel: Ah, you! The other thing I was thinking about was that you had asked me about people in the business that were the most memorable to me. I named off a few, but after I got into this business it was really strange because of the close-knitness of the whole wrestling world itself. Each and every person that I met at one time or another had some type of impact on my life, especially the last six years and working so closely with everyone in the WWF. I didn't mention Mr. Fuji. Anytime I needed somebody to talk to, he was always there no matter if it was a woman problem or a professional problem. Any topic that was possibly bothering me at the time I was able to talk to him about. The same goes for each and everyone that I worked with, at one point or another each of them helped enhance my life to the fullest. I'm writing a book with my girlfriend Mary Ann Ryan, who has a degree in journalism in Chicago, and that's probably going to come out in the next year. That book will go more into detail about different things that happened to me over the last 13 years. Mary Ann, Kathy (Fitzpatrick), and Mike McGuirk have probably been my best friends. Each and everyone, regardless of their characters and what people think of them, they're human beings and they're very caring people. It's really terrible because people think that once they get a certain age sometimes they have no more to learn, that they know everything. I've always thought and my mother has always taught me to always keep my mind open to new things. You're never too old to learn something new. But I also just wanted to say, to all of the men and women of the World Wrestling Federation, the six years that I spent with them were the most fabulous of my whole career and that through them I've learned and hoped that I've learned to be a better person and a better judge of things to come in my future. To each and everyone of them, I just want to tell them all thanks. And I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to say these things and to express my feelings.

INTERVIEW MADUSA MICELI

The following interview that was published in issues #20 and #21 with Madusa (Debbie) Miceli was conducted via telephone from her home in Tampa, Florida on January 12, 1993.

Clark: How did you first get started in professional wrestling?

Madusa: I started back in '84. I was a nurse before wrestling. I met an old girlfriend on a beach in Minneapolis, a beach bar. We were just playing volleyball and I ran into her and she introduced me to her friend, which was her boyfriend. He told me that I would be good in athletics and I was always a big jock through high school in track and gymnastics, etc. I actually thought he was coming on to me in front of my girlfriend so I thought he was like a real big jerk. And he said, "Want to try wrestling?" I thought he thought mud wrestling or jello or something so I just kind of blew him off. Anyway, my girlfriend kept on calling me and so finally I went over there and met him. He's a Hollywood stunt coordinator and he said he had a friend there in Minneapolis, who was Eddie Sharkey. He introduced me to Ed Sharkey and two weeks later I was in Ed's wrestling camp. I quit my nursing job two weeks after and I never looked back. I did some hardcore wrestling with Eddie and some of the boys there. The guys that were there were really good and had a lot of collegiate and high school wrestling. And I learned it from them and I can't even remember their names now, the guys aren't around. Then I did a lot of amateur stuff with Brad Rheingans from Minneapolis, where he has a wrestling school. So I mainly just wrestled with all men for years. I did a lot of five state areas with Ed Sharkey, I made \$15 a pop, and drive 300 miles. Before, I was set. I had a nice job, had a car, a nice condo, and had a nice bi-weekly check. I gave it all up and went into debt for the first couple years of wrestling, before '85, '86. I guess Ed Sharkey owed my friend a favor so I didn't have to pay that much for school. But, Ed Sharkey even

took a percentage off my \$15 I made each night. Get a load of that. I think that's why they called him "Shark." But, I wasn't greedy. I figured I didn't have to come up with some big lump sum of money or anything. So I was doing that for a couple years, making \$15, \$20, sometimes I even got up to as much as \$50. I thought that was great. Then, I got my big break in the AWA with Verne. And when I made my first payoff of \$125, I was astatic. Then Sherri Martel and I did a loop for a good year or so, a good year and a half. Then, I won the AWA Women's title and she went off to New York (WWF). I stayed for awhile and then I felt stifled, I really did. I just couldn't feel myself growing and this business has- especially back then and even now it is really getting away from, a little bit, but not much-always been a man's egotistical business. And for a woman to get a big break they're always knocked down. Unless if a woman does make it, she doesn't really say anything on TV anyway. A good example of that is Elizabeth. And I would say that a handful of women have really opened the door for other women in management in wrestling. And that is Elizabeth, Sherri, Wendi Richter really could have done well in New York, I believe. Whatever happened up there, I don't know what it was exactly, I heard all different types of stories, but I feel that if that would have went on, I really believe it could have been something for the women. But again women were stopped, just kind of cut. But in the AWA, I felt really stifled and I wanted to grow. I wasn't growing, I was just wrestling and then I started managing Curt Hennig and Kevin Kelly, who is Nailz now. I wanted more, I just wanted to grow, I wasn't greedy. I felt myself growing and I was still in a small place. So I gave Verne-without even know where I was going- my notice, my two month notice. When it was coming up to my last month, all of a sudden, I got a call from Japan, which was really cool. That was in '88, '89. And being intrigued as I was- the only thing I ever saw or heard about Japanese wrestling was that they brutal and they broke bones and it was pretty legit, it was a shoot. That encouraged me even more to go. My style is very... solid- I'll round it off with a good word- and believable. Meaning that I wrestle. So there's nothing else but to believe in it. So, I went over there intermittently for the first few times, a couple weeks at a time. I just really loved it over there and there wasn't anything here in America for women's wrestling, as I saw it really going downhill and really staying stagnant for awhile. I went there and finally, they asked me to sign a contract, which they had never done with a female wrestler before. That was the first time in history so it was really neat. And I kind of made history and opened the door for other female wrestlers which are now starting to go over there. All-Japan Women's Pro Wrestling is #1 over there. They've been there the longest as far as any man's wrestling and they're very hardcore. I'll always have that close relationship with the Japanese. Once you gain their trust and their faith, they always have their door open for you. I mean if I was in trouble over here in the United States, someone would help me from over there. It's really nice. But, it takes years to gain that, you've really got to prove yourself everyday-where a person would become lethargic here and they just get fed up and they just say, "Forget it," then they'd get real lazy. There, you've got to have that attitude of get up and go every single day. Now that I've opened doors for other women over there, there's a few that have been there- come and gone and come and gone- and no one's really stayed there like I did for a good two years that I did. But at least they're giving other women a chance, and that's what I'd like to see. I mean, if I'm just a door opener all the way through wrestling, if that's all I can be for other women, well, than that is what hopefully I can do. And then WCW, gosh, they really haven't really done much for my wrestling at all. But anyway, from AWA to Japan and I've done a lot of stuff over there. I had my own single CD, had videos, I have an autobiography, and all this other stuff. The opportunity is unlimited over there and they just push you and they're behind you a hundred percent. It felt really good. That's the only place I really got to excel as a woman in this profession. And it's sad that my own country doesn't really stick to one thing. I mean, I just believe if it's done right, women could really go far over here. Anyway, I came back (went to WCW) and kind of mellowed out. I needed a break because working over there for two, two and a half years is like working five years over here. I mellowed out for a month. I did a few spot shows, but I was very limited because I was burnt out a little bit, so I kind of cooled it for a month or so. Then, WCW called me and I went down there for an interview and then they "nabbed" me, so to speak, and I don't mean to brag. I needed to get better established back in the United States because I had been gone so long. But, it didn't take long. I had great opportunities. I did my first wrestling match with WCW near the beginning, and as soon as I did my flying bodyspring off the top rope onto the cement floor onto Michael Hayes, they never let me wrestle again. I guess too many people complained, as far as the boys and what not. Their thing is that- if a woman can wrestle as well as their boys, they probably thought- why should we have them can wrestle as well as their boys, they probably thought- why should we have this women on there out-showing some of our boys. So that's where it's with WCW.

Clark: What is your current contractual relationship with WCW?

Madusa: They gave me a nice three year contract. But the first year was optional as far as renegotiation. I mean, if WCW wanted to sit down and renegotiate or if I did, it was open to both parties. They didn't, they were just going to let it roll over for the next two years. Grant you, I made great money, I make great money with WCW, but it's just money isn't everything. You hear the boys say to me, "Take the money and just shut up and just do it." And I'm thinking- this was what my problem was in AWA. People would say, "Just take your money and shut up and go." I mean, I just can't, I really can't.

Clark: That's great to hear because you seem to care about what you're doing. It's not just for the money.

Madusa: Oh yeah, I always have from the beginning. I think, too, that the only reason why I've gotten as far as I did is probably believing in such. I mean, I make over six digits, and I just feel stifled again. They're really holding me back in my career. There's so much more I can do. And I want to wrestle. But, full-time here in America, women's wrestling wouldn't go and I admit that. But, if they just had me wrestle intermittently or maybe go to Japan, because Japan has been wanting me to go back this whole year and I never even knew about it until recently. Somebody told me there was a fax to WCW from All-Japan Women's Wrestling wanting me to come over. That just about blew my top. That was the last straw. And that's what really made me renegotiate my contract and find out what the hell's going on, where Madusa's going, where she's been, what I want, and what the hell are they going to do. Because if I'm just going to hang onto somebody's arm for the next years, I'm going to get real bored. And then, you're going to start sniffing elsewhere. So, I terminated my contract with Watts. And Watts said, "Well look, if you don't sign my contract, that's fine." And I said, "Well look, I'll take your contract. You write up a rough draft of what you want and I will look it over and on any questions, we'll renegotiate." I said, "Well, temporarily I'll work under my old contract, under my old money, under my old terms, until we come to an agreement." And he said, "Fine." In fact, I didn't even ask for more money, Watts even gave me a raise, believe it or not, and I didn't even ask for it. But, you wouldn't believe the stipulations involved. The new contracts involve where they hold money of yours, and I don't go for that.

Clark: They hold it until the end of the quarter?

Madusa: Yeah, it's called a cycle period. He called it a cycle period and he wants to hold money. We don't like those "good girl clauses" type of thing. So at the end of three months, if Watts doesn't go ballistic, he can decide if he wants to give you the money or not. And I feel that if at the end of three months if Watts is on a PMS syndrome... I mean, it'll scare you shitless if some man's going to keep your money or not. It's bullshit. I couldn't agree with those terms. I had my lawyer come up with a rough draft of my version. So he (Watts) called me back two days after, he said, "Fine, we'll work under the old terms and the old money until we come to terms," and told me, "I'm sorry, you've got to sign my contract by such and such a date or else, that's it." I said, "Okay, fine. Watts, I quit today." He said, "What, you can't quit today," and I said, "I quit. As of January 3, 1993, my contract is terminated. Goodbye." I hung up and then all of a sudden, someone walked in the office, they asked where I was, because I was supposed to be doing all the commercials for Superbrawl, like I did for Halloween Havoc. So, someone asked where I was and they said that I quit because Watts said this and that and they went off. I got a nice little call from a WCW associate and Bob Dhue and Ole Anderson- and all people probably a little pissed on what's going on in WCW. Even from Sting himself, saying, "Look, if we lose you, this company's going to lose a lot." I never even knew that people really felt that way. It kind of felt good and finally realize where you kind of stand in the company. Cause you're not going to have any man tell you that exactly until, what, you lose a leg or something.

Clark: Was there much communication with Watts or others about how they felt about what you were doing?

Madusa: Well, it was always, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's good." You know, something like that. Dusty was real workable. I love Dusty to death. He'd listen to my ideas and we'd put them together and we'd work things out. Dusty believes in me and I think that's what helped me really excel a lot and do as much as I could do with WCW. People have their own views, ideas, feelings on everybody, but that's life. But, I really believe if WCW keeps losing talent, it's going to be very hard and it's going to be a long time before they get themselves rebuilt. And I can't surround myself in an environment that doesn't believe in me and that won't let me grow because I'm a woman.

Clark: How would describe the atmosphere in WCW amongst all the employees right now?

Madusa: Very stale.

Clark: Is there any motivation amongst everybody?

Madusa: No. I've heard people that I wouldn't even have thought sit there and complain. I'm not a complainer, I just roll with the punches. But, I hear it coming from guys that are the quiet ones that they're just miserable.

Clark: Has the travel had any effects on you?

Madusa: Oh, no. When I was wrestling in Japan, sometimes we were gone for almost a month and a half. So actually, it (WCW) was kind of a vacation. And plus, I was around people that spoke my own language. No, I've been doing the travel for about eight years now. Actually, I've been out for about a week or a week and a half

and I feel like I want to bounce off the walls. I'm going crazy, it feels like I've got to get back out there. There's a lot of things I've got going on. My first love was and always will be wrestling. But, I've got other little survival things, but it's not the same as being out there. Nothing will ever take the place of wrestling.

Clark: Where do you think WCW is headed right now?

Madusa: It's hard to tell because they're having a complete empolyment shift, all the way from payroll to vice president of WCW. They have the old coming in as far as the AWA people. They have Bill Dundee in as an agent. Greg Gagne is up in the air. I just see the old format of that AWA situation happening. And then what happened there? That's all I'll say.

Clark: Do you really think that could happen?

Madusa: I don't know. I can't believe anybody staying and working under those terms of a ballistic, him being Watts.

Clark: Was your contract different than other male employees?

Madusa: The only thing different between mine and theirs is that I was under one of the old contracts with the Rick Rudes, the Stings, Madusa, Paul E., and I even think Hyatt had one of the old contracts. So there's only five of us that were still under the good, old contracts that kept us motivated, that kept us wanting to work, that kept us wanting to have new ideas. And I will stipulate that Kip Frey gave out those contracts because WCW was in debt. Kip Frey gave out those contracts because WCW had money to give and to keep us happy. We have to have some type of an incentive. I don't care, the one thing that Watts keeps forgetting is that he keeps trying to be this great facilitator- which he is not, I feel because he gives the whole WCW when he gives us these big lectures and what not, he gives the meetings like he's some big football coach and we're the players. If he's giving those examples, those guys only play how many months out of the year, plus they get paid fully, they get paid ten times as much as we do, and they get all those benefits. So he's trying to practice as this facilitator, but he's not giving as one.

Clark: From what I've heard, Bill Watts believes that the new contracts will give the wrestlers more incentive to work hard and want to produce more...

Madusa: Why doesn't he phase his then? His isn't a quarterly contract. We want some type of guarantee, a little one. Why in the hell can't we have our old contracts? I'm not saying word by word, but once you start taking them away from us, look what happens- you're going to start losing talent and you're going to start getting in people that don't mean shit and that are going to work for that because they just need work- and you can't build anything on that. There's a lot of great talent out there that perhaps he may be bringing in, I don't know, we'll have to see. I just feel that Kip didn't give out those contracts because WCW was in debt. Kip had to get those contracts okayed, by the way, or else Kip would have been fired on the spot. But Kip was only a fill-in for awhile anyway. And Kip was their solicitor, so Kip is not going to do anything wrong. Kip is still around on the south side tower.

Clark: What was the present situation involving medical benefits for the wrestlers. What kind of changes were made with them?

Madusa: He took it completely out, saying that if we were wrestling for a WCW event, or managing or whatever, in a building, in the ring, doing what we're doing, or walking towards the ring; that if we fell and slipped and cracked our head open or busted our arm while wrestling, they weren't responsible. That's another thing in the contract. I said, "Out of here." You wouldn't believe the new contract. It's like he just came up with all these ideas, he gave it to some women to rough draft it, and said, "Here, this is what I want," she goes, "Okay," and types it up. I got this rough draft and I thought this guy is crazy. Sorry, I can't sign this. So, that's when Dhue and his right hand man lawyer friend of his, he called here and said, "Well, what do you want Madusa? We don't want to lose you. Dhue really likes you and..." So that's what I'm doing now, I'm putting what I want. And it really isn't me, me, me. There's only a few little things I want to change in his. I'm trying to stick by what Watts has to offer. But, we will see if they bite at it. If they don't, I've got another option.

Clark: Was there any legit heat between you and Paul E.?

Madusa: No, except for probably about two years or a year and a half ago there was. The only thing I didn't like, and this has to do with personal... I just didn't like what he did and what he contributed to someone that was close to me and I didn't like how he would say one thing and do another and more or less, he would talk behind people's back and was a backstabber. I remember him from way back in the AWA days, so I know what Paul E.'s about. I know what he's capable of. His power, his strength, his muscle, is his mouth. Paul E. and I get along real well. But, if he says one thing, I'll be right there to defend myself, and he knows that. So if he goes off on a tangent, I'll just superkick him or something! But, there's great admiration and respect for the man because he has good talent. And I don't care what anyone says, you've got to look at the talent, not personal shit. You've got to overcome all

those adversities if you really want to make it.

Clark: What do you think of the idea of having him sit out until his contract runs out while he's making big money, instead of utilizing his talent?

Madusa: I wish I could say in this interview. But, I just think it sucks, that's all.

Clark: In your opinion, nowadays, what do you think the image of women is in pro wrestling? How do you think women are looked at in pro wrestling today?

Madusa: Actually, I think I'm making a mark here and there. And now when women's wrestling is discussed, people say, "Women's wrestling has really come around." But a lot of guys probably still sit in the front row and watch a few things move, watch hip gyrations, and a little bit of jiggle, jiggle here and there, you know, there's a little bit of sexism in there. But I believe that hopefully I'm making a mark there because of my wrestling ability and that it's getting over. And they can see what I'm doing in the ring, and they respect that. Guys like to see women kick butt, not just scratch and pull and whine.

Clark: Do you think that looks and appearance have been getting over for a long time more than the athletic ability or the intelligence of a women, in wrestling?

Madusa: I believe it's how you present yourself. And you're going to have to choose before you even start wrestling, of which direction you're going and how you want to carry yourself throughout wrestling. I mean, a women can be absolutely beautiful, but as soon as she opens her mouth, you could lose her. I think we all know- we won't mention any names- we're familiar with certain characters like that.

Clark: How did you feel about the way they presented the Alexandra York character?

Madusa: I mean, it was refreshing, it was very refreshing. It was something different. It was nice. But I believe that probably could have gone a lot farther, but I will say without elaborating that it had to do with a bunch of personal stuff and that's the only reason why she had to leave, which is a bunch of shit. That's the problem with WCW and the problem with me, it just becomes personal. They just don't like women getting too far ahead. I hope to prove to them they're wrong. This just makes me go out there and be even more hungry. I don't care if I'm in this business ten more years. When I come up to a block, a brick wall like this, it makes me even more hungrier. It pisses me off even more. I keep making that step further and further and further, that's all I can do. It just makes me stronger.

Clark: It seems as though women are so much more respected over in Japan. What kind of an experience was it for you there?

Madusa: It's great. When you get in there, you had your preliminaries your first few matches. I mean, you go out there and we have to wrestle. I was exhausted. I got my ass stretched nightly. I mean, there wasn't any victories over there for a long time, but then when you do win, there's so much gratification, you just feel so good about yourself. I even got huge trophies, medals around my neck like the Olympians get, nice certifications, huge press coverage, parties. I mean, it's absolutely phenomenal. I would go back there in a heartbeat. And they want me there, so who knows.

Clark: And it's not just the money, but the money is great...

Madusa: Are you kidding? I make less over there than I did in WCW. And everyone thought I made a lot of money. But to be straight with you, I made less money over there when I was over there. But you know what, you can't buy knowledge. Nothing ever can take the place of what I have learned over there, or let it be taken away from me. Unless you're over there, I really can't explain it or stress it enough how rewarding it is.

Clark: Have you been around a lot of people lately who have a different attitude than you and are just there for the money and don't take a lot of pride in their work?

Madusa: I'm sure it just isn't WCW. I mean, you get guys that probably have been in the business twenty years that will finally say, "I've been doing it so long..." And you don't blame them, after twenty years of bump-taking. It's got to be for the money. First, it's for working hard, pleasure, and getting better and stuff like that. After a while, it's for the money. Then, it's for yourself. But, I'm still driving. I don't know what's wrong with me!

Clark: Getting back to women's wrestling in Japan, what do you think happened for the women to have a much more respectable image over there than over here in the states?

Madusa: Because they keep face. That means, when they have a problem or if a situation isn't right, they don't sit there and talk bad about it, they keep face. Women are really respected because they're on an equilibrium, they're equal. On anything that goes on over there, they're equal because everyone is driving for the same thing

in life. That's why Japan hasn't fallen, because everybody helps each other. If one company goes bankrupt, well, someone's going to help that company to get back on its feet. And then, they just keep going, going, going. And that's the thing that I'm talking about with women's wrestling and everything like that. Women have problems and stuff like that. You'll see the women ask the men, "Show me this move." And the men will get there in the ring with the girls and just kill them until they get it right. And then finally, they get it right. A girl like me, I've asked the guys several times, "Will you workout with me in the ring," nowadays. "What are you nuts? What, I can't do that. Oh, I've got to go get ready or something." I always get to the arenas really early, an hour and a half or so beforehand, and I always like to workout. One time I was told to get out of the ring and not to workout anymore. And that's my own profession. I remember that, that happened about six months ago. And when I heard that, I knew that the shit was happening. It's a bunch of crap.

Clark: Have you ever been held back before with your talent?

Madusa: I'll give Verne Gagne a lot of credit because he's the only one that really gave women a big break on television, way back when with Sherri and I. But, they held me to a certain position. And then WCW was holding me back.

Clark: What kind of reasons do you think they have for holding you back and not utilizing your talents?

Madusa: I'm a woman. There's no other way I can put it. This is a man's world in professional wrestling. Has there been one huge, enormous talent. I can name 10,000 men in professional wrestling that's gotten big breaks, big pushes, big marketing deals. Even Elizabeth, her only big marketing promotion behind her was TV and a few posters. She got a lot of coverage, but she didn't get to talk. And then you have Sherri. But, why isn't there a woman out there like that? That's why I really believe that Wendi Richter really could have made it for women. But then, whatever happened, it never did. She was right there and could have had it, but something, somebody stopped it. But, hopefully I can be an apparition of Wendi Richter, I really mean that. I believe so.

Clark: Do you find yourself day to day fighting a cause?

Madusa: No, I don't strain myself and I don't find myself fighting anything. No, I have everything well planned out. If it becomes a strain to me and a headache, why even do it? But, I enjoy it. It's a challenge.

Clark: Do you think that the image of women in pro wrestling in the states will change to a more respectable one in the near future?

Madusa: I believe it's happening now because... I mean, if GLOW doesn't get back out on the air, or POWW doesn't get back out on the air, or something sleazy like that. But, it's always going to be there. And I say that you can't take away, you can't think bad of people that are trying to make money. But, then it just makes it harder for us to really protect what we believe in and put quality into what we're doing. But, I believe it's on the right track. I have hopeful thoughts and hopeful feelings for the girls that I feel have any talent. Hopefully, they can carry it on after.

Clark: Well right now, wrestling is really going through a lot of changes and what future do you see?

Madusa: I see a great future in wrestling, I really do. I believe that it's making that turn-around. The future in wrestling is not really house shows, the future of wrestling is going to be TV and PPV. And maybe two, three times a month, you're going to have big shows where people actually can see it live. And all those other little house shows will be knocked out, which will drive the independent market back up and it'll give the wrestlers more opportunity. So, that's what I think.

Clark: That would fit the argument about the wrestlers being independent contractors.

Madusa: We've always been, since day one. We've never been an employee. Never. Not one.

Clark: How do you feel about the promoters today eliminating some of the gimmicks and going back to the basics?

Madusa: The basics are fine. If you're going to have a gimmick, make sure there's basics involved, because this is sports entertainment. And I believe in the sport very much, but you don't have sellouts in collegiate and high school wrestling, right?

Clark: Right.

Madusa: Right, so you cut it- sports entertainment. So, you have your entertainment, you have the basics of wrestling, and you spice it up.

Clark: And with those changes of going back to the basics, I also think with that, the

image and the portrayal of women in wrestling is going to change and it's going to go back to where women are pushed or are more emphasized based on their athletic ability and because of how they perform.

Madusa: Yeah, they need to. What they need to do is to bring some Japanese girls over here for about six months.

Clark: That'll put the American fans in a daze.

Madusa: Yes. You'll see things changing if I can help it.

Clark: How do you feel about some of the abuse of women that they have showed on TV such as Nikita Koloff throwing you and The Ultimate Warrior beating up Sherri Martel and ripping her clothes off? How do you feel about all that?

Madusa: I thought that was a great angle (Koloff throwing Madusa in the ring). Are you kidding? That thing was great. It's sports entertainment. I mean, I think wrestlers are almost the greatest people on this earth because you have athletes, you have actors, you have stunt people, you have professional people, business people, all in one. And this is also why I think California, Florida, whoever, these movie people are starting to realize that, "Hey, these people can act and they can do their own stunts and they've got a good head on their shoulders, and hell, we don't have to hire six people for one show." But to answer your question, I really think that there's good angles, and there's limitations. But, you've got to get almost personal and emotions into angles for people to watch them nowadays. That's what I believe happened to AWA. Because they didn't change with the times, they folded. If you don't change with things, things become old and people are going to move on and watch more exciting things. I mean, people would rather watch Full House than My Three Sons-those are good examples. I think that it's a soap opera, but it doesn't have to be dragged out like that. I think if you can combine it all, but keep your basics there, people are going to bite at it. But, you've got to nail the basics. A lot of them have that, with the gimmicks and the Doinks. In fact, I just saw Doink on TV the other night, I laughed my ass off. Yeah, he's a clown and what not, but he looks like a sadistic Clockwork Orange character. Now, I've seen him wrestle, and when he puts his mind to it, he can. So if he can combine that, he's going to be one hellish heel. I mean, I thought it was great, some schizophrenic clown. If he can carry that image throughout, great, but if he starts overdoing it, you can kind of tell which path it's going to go.

Clark: But do you think that with the situation the business is in that they should push a gimmick like that? It looks like wrestling is slowly going back to the basics and this type of character isn't going in that direction.

Madusa: There's a lot of creativity there. Any master genius can probably see it. And as much as I love wrestling, I mean, who knows, I might become the first woman assistant booker! But, I see creativity here with this Doink. I mean, this guy may not just stay with this clown image and be a sadistic Clockwork Orange type of character. All of a sudden, he gets this great title shot against Bret Hart. All of a sudden, he pulls off his wig and smears his makeup off his face, and people can see he's a man. I mean, there's so much more you can do with it. His whole schtick could be that he's a practical joker and he hates kids and he needed to do this to get to his position because people start paying attention to him. I mean, think about it, it could be full-time or it could be part-time. And there's so much creativity. This is the fun and the imagination and the beauty of being a booker.

Clark: Is that something you're interested in right now?

Madusa: You never know! I'd be the first woman booker!

Clark: Back in the summer as part of WCW's Beach Blast, they had a bikini contest that involved you and Missy Hyatt. Did that fit the way you want to present yourself and the image that you want to portray of yourself?

Madusa: Actually, to make a long story short, I had nothing to do with that. And because I was under contract, I have to do what they say. Also in this new contract, if there's something in there that I don't like, I want to be able to negotiate it. Number one- I didn't have any say in it. Number two- I didn't like it. Number three- I evaluated it and then said, well, people have just seen me in Japan for the last couple years and now- hardcore. Almost to a situation where people were thinking, well, is she a woman or isn't she, you know. So I thought there's nothing more in this world that gets somebody over than a shocker. You have an image for so long, and all of a sudden, you do something so out of the ordinary, and then boom, you have your same image. Then, you have this picture in your mind and people are going, "Holy shit, she's got this but she's got that too." And that makes you more marketable. Standing next to Missy Hyatt, I wish I could have had a two for one boob job or something, but, I guess she had an original weapon to take care of everything. But Missy's a beautiful girl, and she's the one that wanted it because she was there first at WCW, because I started saying on TV that I was the first lady of WCW. And she got hot. This is all real personal bullshit. I started laughing. I said, you can't be serious, this is a work. "I want to be first lady," and she went to Kip Frey and started

whining. "I'll show her up, tell her I want to see her in a bikini contest." Kip was pulling his hair out. Missy is a big complainer. Bless her heart, if that's how she's getting things in life, well then that's her tool. Actually, the bikini contest was okay, it was cute. Overall, I thought it was a nice little change in pace for Madusa, but of course, you don't see her prancing around like that all the time. Maybe once a year at Beach Blast. That's the only time you guys will see me in a bathing suit.

Clark: I knew a young female wrestler who was pretty small and she felt so much pressure to be bigger that she was taking steroids and then she felt good about herself. Do you have any feelings on a situation like that involving steroids?

Madusa: Well, that's too bad that she doesn't have enough control over herself to say, "Screw you, I can do it by myself." But, I never had a problem wanting to be anybody else. I think I'm just so tunnel-visioned in seeing something. I've always had like five year plans and I've really stuck to my plans. Once you get off track, you lose everything in life. You start going sporadically at all different venues, you lose it. I never really felt that I had to be on steroids to make myself better. There's been some questions about a few girls. If they still take them, that's their prerogative. It's like being a stripper- I mean, if they have the body and the beauty to do it, well then be so. They make good money, then do it, but don't bring it in my house. But, everyone has to make a living and if she feels that she has to take steroids to make a better living, if she's small or what not, then that is her prerogative. It's not going to make you grow, it's just going to make you wider and thicker, and especially on a woman, it is really going to screw you up.

Clark: Did you ever try them or simply experiment with them?

Madusa: I had one example with steroids. I think it was when I was just beginning wrestling, and that's when I was really huge. I was squatting like 225. I was huge. In fact, I was just starting to come down off my heavy weight, when I was in AWA. You could see my legs were like almost 26 inches when I wrestled Sherri Martel at the Cow Palace or somewhere. God, my back looked like a man's back from the back. And I didn't have to be that big, but I was into bodybuilding at the time. So the only time I ever tried steroids was about seven years ago, and that was on Anivar. I only did an eight week cycle, a six week cycle. I was in my fourth week out and I started pissing blood. It hurt like a mother, it scared the shit out of me. When I started it (the six-eight week cycle), I told my physician so I'd be watched under a physician. I told my physician right away what was happening and she said, "Get the hell off it and don't ever do it again." Well, of course when I started pissing blood, it was ripping out my kidneys. And that scared the shit out of me and I never did it again. Of course, in life, it's just like anything, you try things. I wasn't glibble and naive. It's just that Anivar is a certain type of steroid where it makes you hard like a mother, it makes you lose weight. It was excellent, in fact, but I'd never, ever do it again. Especially with my body changing and me getting older. I mean, I'm not thirty yet or anything, but still, I want to have kids in the future.

Clark: It's great to hear the drive you have and the striving to succeed and do well at what you do.

Madusa: I'm just very lucky, I really am. I don't even know what it is. Maybe it's my personality. Maybe it's because I have so much energy. Maybe it's because I want to succeed. Maybe it has to do with my childhood. Maybe it is from not having any brothers or sisters and not really having a mom and a dad throughout your whole life. I'm just scared shitless, I'll never live like I did when I was a child, without anything. I think that's what it is, I think that's where the drive comes from.

Clark: Were you very independent as a child?

Madusa: I was so independent, it was just ridiculous. I was five going on thirteen, it was silly. My parents were divorced when I was seven and I didn't see my father for like five or six years, I didn't even know him. And then my mother threw me at him, she said, "Live with him." My mother really wasn't a mother. I really don't have a relationship with either one. My mother and I maybe have gotten a little closer- we may pass each other on the street and say, "Hi." I mean, there's respect there, but I'll never forget. There's a lot of things I could get into, but I won't get into detail. I won't forget but I forgive. You just go on, and I think that's what really gives me the drive.

Clark: Some people don't realize how much of an effect things like that that take place in your childhood have on people.

Madusa: Yeah, I never think about it. But I think subconsciously it's there. I don't ever think about it, it's already past and gone. And I've lived with it all my life, so it's not like I think about it all the time. Yeah, I was on my own when I was fourteen. I lied about my age. I had my apartment. I had my own vehicle when I was sixteen. I guess you could say I survived. I'd give my mother money to make it, with her on welfare, that type of thing. Going to the store was kind of embarrassing when I had to go there with food stamps.

Clark: It seems as though all these tough experiences may have made you a stronger person, though. If you don't mind me asking, what kind of an education did

you have?

Madusa: I quit school when I was sixteen because I had to provide for myself and my mother. I had my first full-time job when I was fourteen, I worked at Arby's. It's so funny now that I'm thinking about it and talking about it. But, I had my first full-time job when I was fourteen and I carried it off until I was sixteen. I quit school when I was sixteen, I had gotten my GED. Then, I went through modeling school. I got a lot of modeling jobs because I was so tall and slanky and I hated makeup, and that's kind of what they were into back then. Big bell bottoms, I remember that. And then, I went into nursing. I was nursing after that and then, I got into wrestling. And know, here I am.

Clark: What does the future look like for you? Is there still a possibility that you could work something out with WCW?

Madusa: Right now, yes. There is a possibility, if he bites at my offer. And the offer is nothing that is unreachable, it is very workable. I've always been workable or else I wouldn't have gotten as far as I have in wrestling. My contract is officially terminated, but they really want me to come up with something and want me to work. And they feel that if I leave, it will be a great loss for them. I think them feeling that way really makes me feel good. I think they really have to change. Bob Dhue said that if I wanted to go to Japan and wrestle, that I could intermittently, once in awhile. I think they're really starting to hear me and see things. I think me pulling out for a week or even if it's up to another month, if I have to do that to get what I want or to open doors for other women in the coming future, that's what I'll do.

Clark: Is there a movie career or anything like that in the future that you're interested in?

Madusa: Yeah, there has been offers, and then there's been money problems where the movie didn't start and stuff like that. There's one right now, it's a high action martial arts film, it's going to be filmed out in California this coming summer. And that's about all I can say about that! And I'm living in Tampa, Florida now with my sweetheart Greg Valentine. We have a great life and it's really good, it's very healthy.

INTERVIEW PAUL E. DANGEROUSLY

The following interview that was published in issue #22 with Paul E. Dangerously (Heyman) was conducted via telephone from his home in Scarsdale, New York on February 12, 1993.

Clark: How did you ever first get involved in professional wrestling?

Heyman: When I was thirteen, I had all this money from my bar mitzvah and I was a really big wrestling fan. I had been corresponding with some people in Florida, California, Texas, St. Louis, Kansas City, San Antonio, and I was spending a fortune mailing them pictures from Madison Square Garden. So, I took the money that I had from my bar mitzvah and I bought a really good printing press and I decided just to print stuff about what was going on up here in the WWWF, and I would incorporate their reports and stuff from the programs that they were sending me, and just do a newsletter, which was just kind of like a monthly up-to-date version of the Apter magazines. But, I beat Apter's magazines to the punch because we'd have the news way before them because they were six weeks behind everything. And from there, I just worked hard at getting some interviews with some of the guys at the hotel or at the White Plains West Chester County Center. Arnold Skaaland gave me a press pass for the County Center in White Plains, which was not that far from my parents house. I got to know some of the wrestlers and I distributed enough of the newsletters or the bulletins, that it caught the eye of a bunch of people at the WWWF, and they appreciated the fact that I was working so hard on it. Lou Albano and Freddie Blassie- who lives ten minutes from me- would always bust my chops. They gave me a press pass for the Garden, the good word had already been put in for me. By the time I was fourteen, I was doing everybody's fan club and doing the newsletter. I was backstage and up at the ring at Madison Square Garden and Vince McMahon Sr. gave me \$50 one night for a couple pictures I had taken of Andre the Giant. Every Madison Square Garden card after that I would always give an assortment of pictures to Vince McMahon Sr. and he'd always slip me \$50 or something, and it just took off from there.

Clark: So, there were a lot of people there helping you. I mean, there wasn't anybody there who was trying to stop your success?

Heyman: No, there was tremendous support from everybody. George Napolitano started printing my pictures in the magazines and so did Bill Apter, and I was writing for George. I started taking trips on the weekends, I was still going to school. I'd take a trip to Montreal. I'd get a really cheap ticket to Montreal, fly up there and photograph the matches, and fly back. It would be made worth my while because I could sell to both Bill and George. I was also working for Norman Kietzer out of

Minnesota. I'd also use the pictures in my own bulletins. I was doing the inserts for the programs for all the WWWF shows in New Jersey. So, there was always a place for the pictures and trips were made worth my while.

Clark: How did your parents react to all this?

Heyman: I was an atypical child. I wasn't really your normal kid. I was very atypical. But I was making money and I was ambitious and it was very entrepreneurial and it took a lot of initiative and a lot of hard work, and I took it very seriously and I had a lot of fun doing it. They admired the fact that I was willing to work so hard. I would run home from school to put together the newsletters, the bulletins, and the fans clubs and develop the pictures, because part of thing that I did with the money was that I bought all this photographic equipment so I could develop my own stuff. So, it took a lot of initiative and they liked it. I mean, there was always the, 'Gee, I wish he'd play baseball in the summer,' or you know, 'The other kids are staying after school to do tennis or gymnastics or football.' But, my thing was always business. That was me, I was always interested in being in business.

Clark: How did you make your first connections and contacts to get into the business?

Heyman: I was head of public relations at Studio 54 when I was nineteen and twenty years old. This was 1985 and up till the time that it closed due to insurance problems in April 1986, I was editing three different magazines, two of them based out of New York City- *Wrestling Power* and *Double Action Wrestling*- and I was a feature editor for Norman Kietzer's magazine- *The Wrestling News* out of Minnesota. But the bulk of my income came from Studio 54. When that shut down, I had already started up my own public relations firm with a couple of partners in New York. But, we didn't have enough clients to where I was going to continue with the lifestyle I had become accustomed to, at such a young age, after losing Studio 54. At the time for about a year, I had been doing ring announcing and play by play on all these Northeast independent television shows. Back in '85, '86, there had to be ten to fifteen independents in the Northeast. It was a full-time place to work in the Northeast in 1985 and 1986. It was huge here. I was doing play by play on everybody's TV, and I got to enjoy it. I never had ambitions to go past that. Also with some of these promotions, even though I was so young and I wasn't directly involved in the business, I did have unique concepts, by wrestling standards, for television, for the formatting of the shows. I had different ideas, that's why they were unique. Not that they were good, not that they were better, not that they were ingenious, not that they were anything of the sort. They were just different, it was something different, away from the norm. Again, atypical! A lot of people are under the impression that you always give something new a chance. I got involved in the behind the scenes aspect as well, and I enjoyed that, too. But what happened was I had this void in my income. And a lot of the guys that I had gotten to be friends with were nagging me to go in front of the camera, full-time, and make my living doing this. It ended up being a dare by Bam Bam Bigelow, who is a very close friend of mine, he dared me to do it. And he said, 'If you don't at least try this, you're a chickenshit.' I was originally going to manage him, but he got a different job opportunity. A very good friend of mine from Larry Sharpe's school, much like Bigelow, big Mike Moore, who was 6'6" and 340 at the time, was telling me about this guy down at the school, big Mark Dumer from Baltimore, who was 6'3" 330. I took one look at them together and I said The Motor City Madmen. Going on Bigelow's dare, I got us a whole bunch of bookings in the Northeast independents, and on January 2, 1987 in Salem, VA, we debuted for the NWF.

Clark: Were you making good money back then?

Heyman: The deal was I would also do public relations for any independent that would use us. So, I was doing the public relations and I was helping them with the production of the shows and everything. So, it wasn't just as a performer or as a manager or as a talent, I helped in all aspects. So, we were making real good money. I made better money with the Northeast independents in my first month in the business, than I did in Florida afterwards, which was from February 1 to March 15, or even in Memphis when I was managing Austin Idol, Tommy Rich, and Lord Humongous against Jerry Lawler. I didn't make that kind of money until I went to work for the AWA. I made really good money in the independents because at the time I was helping out so much behind the scenes, we had the opportunity to ask for a higher price than what our name was worth. I left the AWA the day before New Year's Eve, at the end of the year 1987, and I went to Southern Championship Wrestling in Georgia which Jerry Blackwell had started. I started in Continental on May 1, 1988.

Clark: Through all those experiences and going from territory to territory, what was your favorite place to work?

Heyman: Las Vegas. I really enjoyed working in Las Vegas. The crowd really took to us. It's an exciting town, I love Las Vegas itself. We had a reprieve with the people there at the Showboat when we were working with the AWA. It was a real kick for me, it was a real thrill. I've got to admit, Memphis was a big thing because at the

time Austin Idol and Tommy Rich were the hottest things in Memphis in a long, long time and I was fortunate enough to be their manager against Jerry Lawler, where we shaved Lawler's head. A situation of crowd response, that I don't know if anybody will ever see that kind of crowd response again in this day in age. I mean, they probably will. But I mean, on a consistent basis, we had that every week. That was also a thrill, but Las Vegas during the early times was without question, just head and shoulders above everywhere else I worked.

Clark: Would you say that through all those experiences in all those different areas that you learned special things in each area that you'll never forget?

Heyman: I wish I had the opportunity to pawn my trade in a few more areas before going to the NWA. It was tremendously educational. You talk about your formative years, and they were. I learned different styles and different techniques and I learned different things from different people. Each place you learn something different. It's not just each place, I try to learn something different from each person that I come across, and I try to learn something different from every city that you apply your trade. I worked in the AWA and you'd be in Minneapolis one night, Las Vegas the next, San Francisco the next, and Denver the next. Well, each of those is like working a different territory because the people respond to different things, and it's a different presentation in each city. I try to pick things up from different people and from different cities and different places.

Clark: Who were some of the people who were very big influences to you and what did you learn from some of them?

Heyman: I had a lot of very big influences. Before I got into the business, I always watched people. I learned a lot by watching Vince McMahon Sr. because of all the wrestlers that he dealt with, I don't really recall ever hearing somebody say, 'I hate that guy.' He had such respect and admiration because he was very upfront with people. He told you, before you started working for the company, the last day you were going to work for the company. He'd say, 'Hey, we're going to bring you in starting September 1 and you finish June 15.' I thought that was a tremendous policy. There was never confusion and there was never bitterness. I learned a lot from Lou Albano. I learned so much from Freddie Blassie, who is somebody whose friendship I cherish. I learned a lot from the Grand Wizard, who was a very nice man and taught me about the politics in this business and would take the time to sit down and explain to me about the nuances behind the scenes of this industry.

Clark: Did that have a big effect on you? To first find out about the insides of the business? I don't know if it would be called ignorance to not find out about the business...

Heyman: I'm still ignorant to a lot of things in this business. You never stop learning. I always ask questions, and that gets on a lot of people's nerves. If I sound stupid when I ask them, that's fine because they're for my edification and I only ask them because I want to know. I ask because I want to know, because I care enough to ask. That's how you learn, by asking. So, nothing really came as a shock, everything was okay, this is how it is, this is how it can be, and this is how things can change. And I accepted them. When I got into the business full-time, I certainly learned a tremendous amount about the psychology and the premise behind the interview from Austin Idol. He was a tremendous mentor when it came to that particular facet of our industry. I learned so much about being a manager and so much about the responsibilities of a manager behind the scenes, in front of the camera, out at the ring, back in the dressing room, twenty-four hours a day from Dennis Condrey. What I learned from Dennis was invaluable. I learned a lot from Tommy Rich, believe this or not, about just being a human being. Tommy Rich, for all his faults and all his personal demons, showed me more compassion, showed me more goodness in his heart than almost anybody I can ever recall meeting in the wrestling business. Tommy Rich, if you would take an x-ray and a catscan of his entire body, does not have one malicious bone. And if he did, that malice has never come out against anybody else except himself. The only person Tommy Rich hurt was himself, and he has such a good heart, and he is such a compassionate person. Tommy really took me underneath his wing. He adopted me like a little brother. And I understand what Tommy's all about, too. But, I will appreciate that this guy really tried for a twenty-one year old cocky, ungrateful punk, and he knew I was arrogant and cocky. I was a twenty-one year old punk making money and on top of the world. And Tommy still took the time to teach me. I learned so much from Eddie Gilbert, who taught me more than I can ever, ever, ever explain. There was so much about this business, there was so much about wrestling, there was so much about TV, there was so much about formatting and there was so much about psychology and so much about life that I learned from Eddie Gilbert. To sit here and say that Eddie Gilbert taught me so much, to sit here and say Eddie Gilbert taught me more in the time that we were together than a college professor could in four years, to sit here and say that Eddie Gilbert taught me as much as I learned from kindergarten to twelfth grade, does not do that man justice. He taught me so much, I cannot describe it in words.

Clark: Would you say that it's lacking these days with some of the younger guys coming in and there aren't as many people who want to help them?

Heyman: I think they're plenty of people who want to help them. I think the thing is that there have been several people who never sought out the advice and everyone's turned off to the younger guys because they think, 'Those young guys think they know it all. Screw them.' And the guys that generally want to learn, have to break through that barrier. I can tell you one guy who I've worked with who never stops asking questions, and not just to people that are older than him, to people that are younger than him. I mean, this guy wants everybody's opinion in the world because he learns from everybody's opinion. That's Steve Austin. And you talk about a guy that really deserves to have the torch passed to him, it's Steve Austin, because this guy learns everyday, every match, every interview, everyday that he's in this business, he learns more because he asks. And he doesn't just ask the people that are smarter or the people that are older or the people that have more experience, he asks people who are less qualified to know than he is. Because everybody's opinion matters to him because it's a different perspective. Steve Austin deserves the torch more than anybody that I know. Steve Austin to me is a franchise wrestler. If I was running a wrestling company, that is somebody I would have absolutely no qualms in signing to a fifteen year contract because he will be around, he will honor his obligations, and he will making and drawing money in fifteen years. And I'm a fan of his.

Clark: Do you think that there has been a change in the role of managers in professional wrestling? Do you think that they have more or less of an involvement in the business these days?

Heyman: I think what happened was that a few managers got to be too big and the industry didn't know how to handle it. Because per se, you got paid by what you drew- and it's the wrestlers' names that are on the marquis, and not the managers' names. But there were a few managers who got to be such big names that they broke through the barrier and became as big of a name or as a big of a star as the wrestlers themselves. And because we have entered the television age of wrestling- and managers are spokesmen and they are front men and they are mouthpieces- the managers got to be as big as stars as the wrestlers because it became a television industry. Now, some of these managers who are not going out to the ring and drawing 20,000 people to Madison Square Garden or 10,000 to the Omni or whatever, are being paid these phenomenal sums of money, and it's hard to justify sometimes, and it's very difficult to explain to a wrestler why 'all managers are making as much as you because of this.' Forget about the time sales, and the advertising, and the ratings, etc, etc. The business just didn't know how to handle this change in the perception of a manager. I think what happened is that because a few of these managers got into that stratosphere, the perceived role of a professional wrestling manager was changed, and everybody wanted the managers to take a step back, because they felt there was too much focus on the managers. So, yeah, I do see less of a focus on managers right now.

Clark: If you look at the WWF's managers- they've got heel managers Mr. Fuji and Harvey Whippleman and babyface managers Jimmy Hart, Sherri, and Slick- and there doesn't seem to be any managers there that really stick out anymore.

Heyman: Because if you ask somebody to name five superstars of the WWF you're going to hear the name Bobby "The Brain" Heenan. Well, Bobby is an announcer/manager and that just goes to show you how famous Bobby became. If you ask somebody to talk about the WWF back in the 70s, they'll mention Bruno Sammartino, they'll mention Chief Jay Strongbow, and the next word out of their mouth is going to be Captain Lou Albano. I would love to see how much merchandise on Elizabeth was sold. The manager as a focal point was also evident in the WWF, as seen by the fame that Bobby Heenan has achieved. So, I think right now in the direction that they're going managers are greatly toned down. I don't know if that is for a reason, or if that is a long range plan. But, it's the case history as for now. There were managers in this business that got to be on par as far as notoriety goes with the wrestlers. And that bothered some people because they felt that it was not productive for business for the manager to be that visible. I don't know if that's right. Back when managers weren't as visible, they were drawing 20,000 people to the Garden. Managers became extremely visible, they're not. I don't think it's the managers' fault, I think there are a lot of things that are wrong in the business. That might be one of them. I don't agree with it. This is just my opinion, and it is a very biased opinion because I happen to have made a career as a manager.

Clark: How much of an effect or how powerful do you think the commentary during matches is to the product?

Heyman: The most powerful person on a wrestling television show is the announcer. Because if it's the greatest maneuver in the world, and the announcer sits there and says, 'You know, I was flossing my teeth yesterday and...' You're going to miss the point. If a guy takes a bodyslam and he hurts his back, and the announcer ignores it, you might not realize it. If Rick Rude is in the ring and he keeps on working on the guy's neck, and the announcer doesn't make mention that it's setting the guy up for the Rude Awakening, what does his Rude Awakening mean when Rick Rude hits the guy with it. Or what did the match mean beforehand? Or it

doesn't show Rick Rude's intelligence to wear the guy's neck down. I think the announcer is the most powerful person on a television wrestling broadcast because he can either explain everything to you or he can totally ignore everything to where you can't understand what's going on. They're telling you the story. The announcers are telling you the premise, what's going on, why it's going on, and what it's going to lead up to. It's the announcers' show. You control it. It's up to you to explain to the public what they're seeing and why they're seeing it and where it's going to lead to. It's up to you. You've got the power. You can either be the greatest asset to the broadcast or you can be its greatest detriment. And it's all a matter of paying attention. If a wrestler has another wrestler down for a two-count and you're sitting there telling a puchline, you completely ignore the fact that a man was one second away from defeat and the other man was one second away from victory. If every time a guy has another guy in a pinning predicament, you acknowledge it, it makes those pinning predicaments mean more.

Clark: Could you tell us about your special contract that you had with WCW where you were actually a TBS employee?

Heyman: It was precedent setting because I was also on the road. I was the first ever wrestling talent on the road who had employee status. It was a most unique situation. This was because when I signed my contract on April 1, 1992, it was as a manager and announcer because I had discussed with management at the time that the Dangerous Alliance will not last forever, that the avenue that we were going down at that time would finally have to meet its dead end. I was always under the assumption, simply because of when I came back from suspension after being solely a co-host and commentator for fourteen months, that I'd always be going back to that. They were very, very interested in expanding the New York market. "Pro Wrestling New York" was an extremely successful show. It was management's opinion at that time, that by the time my contract came up for renewal on April 1, 1994, that I'd be pulled away from full-time managing, much like Bobby Heenan, and that I would concentrate on helping WCW expand the New York market. That is a job that would entitle you to employee status. I was not given the employee status simply because I was on the road and they were going to start doing this for all the wrestling personnel, I was given it because that's the direction where I was headed before the Watts regime came in. And it probably wouldn't have taken effect until towards the end of this year, that my position would have changed.

Clark: Was there anyone who was upset over you getting a contract like that, maybe some wrestlers?

Heyman: They were very happy for me. I worked with a great crew of guys and they were all very happy for me because I worked really hard to get this contract. This was promised to me by Jim Herd, the year before. And at the last minute, he reneged on it. I got very, very upset and I was walking out. They gave me the assurance that I was the permanent co-host on Saturday Night, which is their flagship show for wrestling on TBS. It was an honor and the apex of my broadcasting career to be named co-host. I would have in all honesty, done that show and taken less money than have gone to the WWF and made more money doing something else, because I was so honored that they put that faith in me, that I was not going to let them down. Even if a better opportunity came my way, I was so honored and so privileged and so grateful for that opportunity, that somebody would have that kind of faith in my abilities and in me, that I said whoever made this decision is a person that will never regret it, I will never let that person down. I worked so very hard to make sure that I never let them down on that show, plus I was doing "Pro Wrestling New York." I wasn't formatting the show, but in all essence, I co-produced it because when we came to New York to do the Rap Arounds, I picked the sights, I decided the banner between myself and Jim Ross. As Jim would prepare me for all the other shows that we did, he would prepare me for the wrestling end of "Pro Wrestling New York," but I would prepare him for how this relates to the metropolitan New York area. Because, no knock on Jim, he's from Oklahoma and he lives in Atlanta, he doesn't understand the New York. Nor should he, he doesn't live here, he's not from here. I understand New York because I've lived here all my life, I'm born and raised and still live here. It's my town, it's my market, I understand it. So, I was doing those two shows, and they gave me that to appease me and gave me more control over "Pro Wrestling New York" and gave me more freedom on the "WCW Saturday Night" show. They also gave me some bonuses built into my contract to shut me up because they didn't make me an employee. And so, I swallowed it for a year. When Kip Frey was in charge, the first thing I said to him was, 'This was promised to me last year and I'll even take less money to be an employee.' Which I did. I took less money to be an employee than if I was an independent contractor. This was a goal of mine, it was promised to me, and I want it. It was also a good way to not hide the value of my contract, but it was also a very good way to give me a package that was worth more money than just simply appeared on paper because you could give me x amount of dollars and if you cover all my expenses on the road- hey, if you're on the road 250 days, you're spending a lot of money anywhere between \$45,000 and \$70,000 a year on the road. It wouldn't be a situation where a wrestler would want to come in and say, "If a manager's making this, I want to make this," because my base salary was only this. It was a situation where my base salary was only this, so he could bring in a wrestler and say, 'I'll give you \$25,000 more than Paul E. Dangerously.' So they'll say okay and meanwhile, I'm making a lot more than just

what appeared on paper because a lot of things were covered. It was good business, it was a mutually beneficial deal. Kip Frey didn't give me that deal on a whim and he didn't give me that deal because he's my friend or because he thinks I'm a nice guy, he gave that to me after hardball negotiations and he gave that to as a fair assessment of my ability and my talent. It was my wildest dreams come true because you work and you work and you work, every man has his own fears and insecurities and you have to fight that. You work so hard that sometimes you don't see the light at the end of the tunnel, even if you're an inch away because you're just working so hard that you're blinded by this ambition. And when you're finally rewarded for your hard work, it is so gratifying, but you got this, you've got to earn it. You got to this point, it's not over, it's just beginning. Now you've got to live up to it. Now you've got to prove I was worth this and I'll be worth more next time around. The day I got that contract, my goal was to work so hard over the next two years, that by the time it came up for renewal, that the contract that I had got on April 1, 1992 would seem like a pittance compared to what I'd be worth in '94, cause I was going to work that hard to make myself that much more valuable, that much more of a commodity.

Clark: Was getting that "Saturday Night" show always a goal for you?

Heyman: Well, I was a manager and I never thought of commentary on a full-time basis and when I got to do the morning show on TBS on alternate weeks with Jim Cornette, I kind of liked it. And then they gave me the "NWA Main Event" on Sunday nights with Jim Ross, which I co-hosted in 1989. I originally co-hosted it with Tony Shrivane, and he left after two weeks to go to the WWF, then Jim Ross took over the Sunday night show. It was just a lot of fun because it was always the lowest rated show that they had, and Jim Ross and I went on there and just did the goofiest stuff on the face of the planet. It was so different and so unique. It wasn't taken as far as "Tuesday Night Titans" and wasn't taken as far as some other shows had taken that sort of vehicle, it was like a quality wrestling show and then the Jim and Paul show. And then it was the highest rated show on cable television, not just the highest rated wrestling show, not just the highest rated wrestling show on TBS, the highest rated show on cable television for July, August, and September 1989. We kicked "Saturday Night's" ass every week with the exception of three or four weeks, the whole time that we were on that show together. So, Sunday night became the night. So, I had no desire to do "Saturday Night" and I also didn't understand the fact that I had a future as a full-time commentator. When I came back in 1990, my goal was to be the best commentator in the business and I wanted to surpass the success that Jesse Ventura had. Obviously, my goal in WCW was to do the Clash, the PPVs, and the Saturday night show. I came back hosting the "Power Hour" and then they added "Pro Wrestling New York" and finally I got to do Halloween Havoc and then they gave me the Clashes. Then, Dusty Rhodes came in and took that position and to appease me they gave me the Saturday night show. I really never thought I was in the running for it, that's why I can not say it was my goal. I thought I was going to have to wait two years to get it. This was my goal for two years down the road. We got into a real contract dilemma- they were offering me as much as they were going to give me and I wanted just a little bit more, and to appease me, they gave me that Saturday night show. They started renegotiating my contract with me in January, and it was up in April, because they had big plans for me as a commentator. I told this to Jim Ross, 'I never dreamed that I would have that show at such a young age, I thought I would have to wait two more years for it.' And when they gave me that show, I was very flattered and very determined to not let anybody ever say it was a mistake to put Paul E. Dangerously on that show.

Clark: With politics in wrestling and everything, you can easily obtain positions, but you have to produce in that position for you to last there...

Heyman: With a lot of luck behind you and the right person pushing you, you can always get to the top, staying there is the problem and the real challenge. There are a lot of people who will get their fifteen minutes of fame, there are not that many people who get twenty years of it. If you look at the entertainment industry, Arsenio Hall has achieved phenomenal success. I don't believe he'll have the longevity of Johnny Carson. I certainly would rather be in Johnny Carson's shoes and have thirty years of success at a given level. Arsenio Hall's success may even be at a higher level, but burns out in four or five years. I certainly have a lot more admiration for someone with longevity than someone who achieves incredible success but cannot hold on to it. The real challenge is not to get to the top, the real challenge is to stay there.

Clark: Looking back over Jim Herd's reign of WCW, a lot of things took place during that time period that have a great effect on the company. How would you describe that time for WCW and the effects of it?

Heyman: The company lost a lot of money, theoretically. Because WCW losing money is a real interesting reading of the ledger. Because WCW generates so much money from PPVs, so much money from time sales, so much money from merchandise, and we never get to see it. PPV money goes to Turner Home Entertainment, advertising money goes to Turner Broadcasting, and we never see all this money. We generate all this income, but we don't get to show the profit from it. The Jim Herd era- I've got to admit this now, hindsight is 20/20, but Jim Herd deserves a lot of credit for

one thing- he lasted three years in that position. Kip Frey didn't last six months and Bill Watts got out short. There are a lot of people who sit there now and go, 'How did Jim Herd last three years in that hotseat.' What a survivor. I had my beefs with Jim Herd. I butted heads with Jim Herd. I had my problems with Jim Herd. There are a lot of things that Jim Herd did that I don't agree with, a lot of things I did he probably doesn't agree with to this day. It's funny, if I was ever given a chance to run a wrestling company, one of the first people I would bring in would be my former enemy, my number one nemesis, the guy who I butted heads with, and said that I hated his guts- and did, and still do in a way- but, I would actually call on Jim Herd. I would sit there and say after three years, after looking over your record, what do you think he did right, and how did he do it. Because Jim Herd did a lot of business for WCW when it came to licensing. He generated a lot of income with licensing and was really good at that. He wasn't good at personnel relations. He wasn't good in dealing with the public because he had a terrible temper. He wasn't good at a lot of things. I don't think Jim Herd had a lot of very good wrestling ideas. I don't think Jim Herd had a great television presence. I can sit here for an hour and tell you all that's wrong with Jim Herd, and I'm sure I'd be leaving out a lot, but in looking back over that era, those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. I'd rather figure out what Jim did right, steal that, and just go on from the pitfalls that he encountered.

Clark: How would you analyse the period of WCW with Kip Frey there?

Heyman: Kip Frey did not have enough time at all. When Kip Frey and I discussed his concept of "WCW Saturday Night," I told him straight out I didn't like it. I was honest with him. He liked his concept and he went with it, his prerogative. I respect that. He weighed the positives and negatives. He felt the positives outweighed the negatives, and he went for it. It didn't work. I don't know if he was given enough time to change it. Certainly, if something doesn't work, you keep on trying, and you try a little more. If it still doesn't work, you realize it's a failure. His version of the Saturday night show didn't work. He was not given enough time to change it. Plus, there were people- this is true in any industry and especially in television, and very much so in WCW- who anything that came out of the boss' mouth, 'Oh, brilliant idea, oh you're a genius, oh that's the greatest thing I've ever heard,' and behind his back was going, 'What a dumb ass, that's a terrible idea.' Nobody had the guts to go up to him and tell him it wasn't the right way. The guy had the guts to make a change, the guy had the guts to try something different. To me, if you try something different, you can't go wrong. It didn't go right, so you try something else. I think Kip Frey was judged unfairly because the company was heading down- but not at the rate that it was after he left- and I think Kip was the type of businessman that did realize that if things aren't working, you're going to have to make some drastic changes. Kip was not in it to make a six month profit, Kip did not try to turn the company around in a year, he had a long range plan. Sometimes in a long range plan, you've got to go through a bad period before you hit the good period. I think that during a very bad period, which turned out to be by comparison with what happened after he left, not all that bad, Kip was replaced and Kip just didn't have enough time. I think if they had given Kip more time, he could have gotten this company into a much better position than it is today. I don't think Kip was the man to lead WCW for the next ten years, but I think he was the guy that needed to bring WCW to a certain level, and then somebody else needed to come in and bring it the rest of the way.

Clark: Do you think a problem of his could have been a lack of knowledge of the wrestling business?

Heyman: No, because he admitted it. I admired him for that. Kip's downfall came because Jack Petrik moved on to something else and Bob Dhue and Bill Shaw took over the company, and simply it was a matter of a fact that they wanted a wrestling guy to run the company. That guy was Bill Watts. If it wasn't Bill Watts, it could have been Ole Anderson. If it wasn't Ole, it would have been Dusty Rhodes. If it wasn't Dusty, it would have been Verne Gagne or Gorilla Monsoon- they wanted a wrestling guy. And Kip Frey was a television guy. It was just simple black and white- they wanted a wrestling guy, Kip was a TV guy, they brought in a wrestling guy.

Clark: How much of an effect do you think all these switches of power have had on WCW? And now they're going through another switch of power now.

Heyman: It is very confusing because every time there is a change in the power structure, there are people that are in and people that are out, there are people that are very in at one moment and they're very out at the next, and the people that were very in at one moment are now very out at the next moment. There's no consistency. There's no continuity. Again, it's not just a small change of direction every six months, but it's a major change. It's a drastic change. It takes the fan- Joe and Josephine wrestling fans- six months to understand the direction of the company, and by the time they start to understand it, the company's going in another direction again. It's very confusing to the people in the company as well, trust me. It's like a revolving door.

Clark: Do you think another problem with WCW is something like what you were

talking about earlier, how everybody in the offices is job scared and there may not be enough criticism or enough togetherness of all the office employees to where they can be honest with each other about what's good and what's bad for the company? Or is that just corporate America?

Heyman: Yeah, it's corporate America. But, the entertainment business is a very envious and jealous business by nature. Putting a television announcer in an executive position is a dangerous move because he's going to feel that if somebody criticizes him, they're after his job. As a piece of talent, he wouldn't hear the criticism, the producer would. But if the announcer is also the producer, and somebody who he knows would love to have that position, says, 'I don't think we should be saying this on "Saturday Night,"' he's going to get upset. In a lot of fields, the producer, the director, and the announcer are all different people. There's a lot of jealousy and a lot of envy inside the WCW offices. The problem is that, they don't go to Jim Ross and say, 'We're signing you to this contract and you're the host of "WCW Saturday Night" for the next three years. You cannot be replaced.' Well, if he knows that, he is going to go into that meeting as a producer and he's going to say, 'What's wrong with the show?' 'Well, Jim, we didn't like what you said on "Saturday Night," you need to change your delivery.' He's not going to feel threatened because he knows he has that job secure. And I'm just using Jim Ross as an example. But with WCW, since he's not signed to do that show specifically, and if somebody sits there and says, 'Yeah, Jim, I think you need to change your delivery.' He sits there and goes- oh man, this guy's after my job. And everybody's at each other's throats because of that. Everybody always felt so insecure about their job- which is fine if it brings you to a level of competitiveness in that you try to do your job better and you want to be the best. That's a healthy environment. It's an unhealthy environment when you are insecure about your job because everybody is breathing down your throat and because you don't have the guarantee that you're going to have your job tomorrow, and you assume many different roles, both as an announcer or a talent, a producer, and a director, etc. By the time you get into that meeting, it's already a powder keg, it's a powder keg before the meeting's ever called. The system is designed to fail. The system the way they have it setup there, is structured for failure.

Clark: When Bill Watts came into WCW, he was coming into a system that was already setup for failure. So, can you blame everything that was wrong with WCW on Bill Watts?

Heyman: Yes, because he demanded autonomy and they gave it to him. Can I blame everything on him? No. I blame it on the people above Bill Watts because they were letting him get away with it. Now if they plead ignorance to what he was doing, that's fine. But as I give you this interview, they have not done a whole hell of a lot to reverse a lot of the acts that Bill Watts committed. To me, if these people truly disagreed with the immoral, unethical, and, in my opinion, illegal atrocities that Bill Watts committed while in charge of that company and under their watch, let's see them make the change. Let's see them mend those fences, let's see them correct the situations. I'm not just talking about myself, I'm talking about a lot of other people. But since I'm involved, obviously, this has great personal interest to me. If these people don't correct some of these situations, if they don't reverse some of the policies, if they don't make amends for some of the things that were done, then you can safely assume that these very powerful executives at Turner Broadcasting condone these disgusting tactics that were used by this man who was in charge. And then, it's not Bill Watts who should be lambasted alone, it is these people- who by not taking it upon themselves to fix what he broke- that deserve as much criticism, if not more, because they have the power to change.

Clark: Why do you think it took as long as it did for Bill Watts to be forced out of his position? Do you think it's because of that big corporate structure?

Heyman: I have no idea why he was hired in the first place. If they didn't look into Bill Watts thoroughly enough to realize that he gave this interview (that he did with Wade Keller in *Pro Wrestling Torch Annual IV* in 1991), when in fact, when he was hired, that interview was given as one of the reasons why he got the job. Because of all the great theories and concepts of Bill Watts. And you're telling me that they just happened to miss the last page. Okay, maybe they only saw part of the interview. But they hire a man into this major, major conglomerate known as Turner Broadcasting without even looking into a published interview that he did eight or ten months before they made the decision to hire him. It was not ten years, it wasn't five years ago, it wasn't even a year before he was hired. And they don't even look into his character enough that they would take a look at that interview. How hard is it to look up that interview? Everybody had it. I know I had a copy. I'm sure a lot of people in WCW had a copy. I know Jim Ross had a copy. I wouldn't put that kind of a company in somebody's hands- I'm not saying we need to do credit checks on people, but certainly, you should look into the guy's record. They took a real big risk and they almost got really badly burned. And to be honest with you, if they got burned, they deserve to get burned because the man should have never been hired in the first place after making those statements. That's my opinion, somebody else might have a different opinion. But in my opinion, once he made those statements, it should have been "hands off."

Clark: Based on Bill Watts' success for awhile with his Mid-South territory and his great reputation, what were your personal thoughts when Watts was coming in about the direction and the future of WCW?

Heyman: I approached it the same way I approach anybody whom I've never worked for before. I'll judge him by what he does. I had no problem working for Bill Watts when I heard that he was coming in. I had no fear and I had no joyous anticipation. He was somebody who I had never met. And I did not know how he was going to run the company. He had a tremendously successful period in Mid-South. The company also was run into the dirt to where he had to sell it to Jim Crockett. There's two ways to look at it- hey, this guy ran a successful promotion for years, or hey, this guy ran his own company into the dirt and had to sell it. And you can blame the oil industry or you can blame the depression or you can blame the recession or you can blame, 'My wrestlers were lazy,' 'My wrestlers were on drugs,' 'Vince McMahon stole my wrestlers,' 'Jim Crockett stole my wrestlers,' 'I had problems sleeping at night.' No matter what excuses you use, the company went down and you had to sell it. But, he also deserves credit, the guy ran a successful territory for many, many years. So was it going to be the man that had a successful territory that would be running our company or the man that nearly lost everything and ended up having to sell it, at a great price to Jim Crockett? I didn't know and I was willing to give the guy the benefit of the doubt. Come on in, show me what you got. Not that he has to answer to me, that's just for my own little personal world. Clean slate, he comes in. Whatever he does, you judge by that. If he's successful, he deserves the credit. If he's not, he deserves the blame.

Clark: When you first met with Bill Watts when he came in, did he or anybody else tell you where the Paul E. Dangerously character was going?

Heyman: He came up to me and he told me that he loved my work behind the mic and he thought I was a very exciting manager who understood crowd response and he was excited at the prospect of working with me. He, several times in two or three days, told me how much he liked my interview skills. Then, he found out how much I was making, and that he could change it.

Clark: How did he go about discussing with you the contract you were under and how much money you were making?

Heyman: I got a phone call about three weeks after Bill Watts took over, and I was pretty much told that I was making too much money and that I couldn't be an employee and that this deal was going to have to be changed. There wasn't a lot of hiding. It was pretty straight forward that I was making too much money for a manager and I was an employee, and I shouldn't be, and things were going to have change under Bill Watts. And that if I didn't conform to his way... I have no problems conforming to his philosophy, I had no problems conforming to the way he wants to present the product. I always resented the fact that they said 'conform to his way.' I never had a problem conforming to anybody's way who was in charge. I had a problem breaking an existing contract that I had just signed. I was told, in essence, if I didn't break this existing contract, that I was going to be broken, myself.

Clark: Was there an attempt by them to get you out of the contract by trying to find ways to prove that you breached your contract?

Heyman: They, several times, implied different things and tried to pressure me into signing a mutual lease, with the promise that as soon as I sign it, we will draw up a new contract. At one point, (they) even told me how the new contract would be structured. I signed an existing deal (on 4/1/92). April 1, 1994, if they wanted to change it, that's their prerogative, it's their company. I signed it. I turned down other jobs- some in wrestling, some outside of wrestling. I had a lot of good opportunities when the Dangerous Alliance was riding high- both in and out of this business, that I turned down to sign that two year contract, because I thought that was a good contract and it was fair and it was what I was worth. I wasn't going to give it up two or three months later because somebody had a problem with it. And those other opportunities weren't there anymore. And to be very honest with you, if they would have given me the chance, I would have shown them that I was worth that contract. It was a fair assessment of my talent and ability and I could've proved that to them if they would have given me the chance, they never did. It's not their obligation to give me the opportunity to prove my worth. They don't have to use me at all. They can send me home and say, 'You know what, we don't like you. Go home.' 'Hey, you have one too many cavities. Go home.' 'Hey, we don't like the way your toenails look. Go home.' 'Hey look, it's their company, they can run it any way they want. They're not under any obligation to appease me. They're not under any obligation to showcase my talent. It's their company. But, don't tell me that I can't have what I have earned. Don't tell me that something that I worked a long time for, made tremendous sacrifices for, that I signed in good faith, is no longer there for me because you don't want it there. You don't break an existing contract. You wait till it expires and then you don't renew it or you change what you don't like about it. But, you don't break an existing contract. That's bull. I wasn't going to do it. I'll tell you why. I was there, I was hosting four shows at the time, in that voice-over studio with Jim Ross everyday and I was there and I heard everybody- from Jim Herd to Dusty Rhodes to Jim Ross to the lowest person on the totem pole- bitch, moan, cry like a

baby, scream, holler, and throw temper tantrums when Sid Vicious walked in and said, 'I want half a million dollars.' They called him everything from an ungrateful sonofabitch to language that you shouldn't be printing in The Wrestling Flyer! They were furious. And, no disrespect towards Sid, they had a right to be. They had an existing contract with the guy, it should have been honored until it expired, and then you hit them up for more money. I don't agree with anybody who signs a contract and then says, 'Oh wait a minute, I don't want to honor this agreement anymore.' Well, if they were so angry when Sid did that, don't do the same thing to me that you bitch about, that you moan about, that you cry about, that you scream about, because that's what they did. And by Bill Watts going in public saying, 'It's a buyer's market,' well then, I'll tell you what, as soon as we turn the business around and if it becomes a seller's market, then by his philosophy, I would have the right to say, 'Wait a minute Bill, I know I got this two year contract with you, but you know what pal, you're going to have to double this money or I'm walking out on you, because now it's a seller's market.' Well that wouldn't be ethical for me to do and I wouldn't have done it. I don't care how successful WCW became, I don't care if that promotion became so successful that the money I was getting was nothing short of highway robbery, I was going to honor that agreement until April 1, 1994, even if I was worth a hundred times what I making, and I expected that agreement to be honored by them as well. I lived up to my part of the bargain, they should have lived up to theirs.

Clark: I guess there were situations where they sent you home a couple of times and they were phasing out your character. Were they fair about that or did they keep things from you and not let you know what was going on?

Heyman: They never let me know. After Wrestlewar, I didn't know anything. I never knew where we were headed, I never knew what we were doing. The TV tapings at times would start and we still wouldn't know what matches we had. It was a nonstop day in and day out situation of harassment. It was an absolute hell that was put upon me because they wanted me to quit. They did a real good job of trying to break my spirit, because there would be times when we had a whole day set aside for interviews and I'd get there first and they'd say, 'We haven't done the sheets yet.' Someone else would show up, 'Here's your sheet. Here's all your interviews.' I'd get there at 10am for an 11am interview session. Everybody else would be done by 2pm. There would be two or three people who came in at 1pm, and then I'd get to do my interviews, and it would be one or two interviews, and then they wouldn't even have it down correctly. So I'd have to do two or three different versions of each, never knowing which one was going to be used. And never knowing exactly what to say because of the time frame that was involved. It was done to just keep me sitting. Which again, that's their prerogative, that's fine. They were paying me for the day. You want to pay me to sit there and watch everybody else's interviews for the day, hey, I'll learn from their interviews. I'll learn by watching everybody else. That's fine, you're not doing me any harm. It's aggravating, but you're not doing me any harm. They had a right to do that. I'm not disputing their right to do that. Did I like it? No. Does the fact that I don't like it matter? No. That's tough on me. I never knew anything. Every single day after Wrestlewar I woke up waiting for another surprise.

Clark: Were there times when it would effect your performance?

Heyman: The split up of Bobby, Arn, and myself was devastating. I found out during the show. They never approached any of us. I found out by looking over a certain individual's shoulder and looking at the TV format, and seeing it. It was so heartless, it was so disrespectful, it was so callous of them to have me find out that way. Again, it's not their obligation to tell me, but simple decency would tell you- I worked with these people everyday. We worked very hard together. We worked extremely hard to make that presentation a good presentation. We put our heart and our soul into that. Decency would tell you- sit down with me, tell me this is what's going on. I might not like it, that would be tough on me, but tell me what's going on. They didn't and that was probably the most devastating day of the whole situation because it's when I had to wake up and realize that there's something really wrong going on here.

Clark: Did you ever develop a bad attitude or anything like that?

Heyman: No, it made me work harder. It made me work that much harder.

Clark: You didn't get upset or frustrated after you had worked so hard to get to where you were and then they do this to you- saying to you that all that hard work and everything that you did means nothing to them and it's all just about money and contracts? Didn't that effect you in your attitude?

Heyman: The only person I took my frustrations out on was myself and I started to gain back all the weight I had lost, and then I gained even more weight than I had back when I originally started to lose all the weight, when I was a commentator. I got grossly overweight as far as I was concerned. I think the stress was showing in my face. I think I aged five years in six weeks and it showed. I looked very stressed out, I looked strained, you could see the pressure in my face. But, I wouldn't let it effect my performance. If anything I tried to make my performance even better because your television interviews and what you do out at the ring can be a great

catharsis for you. You can let a lot of aggression out when you're Paul E. Dangerously. Paul E. Dangerously is a very high-strung individual as it is. So I mean, you let a lot of aggression out at the ring and during interviews. But, I tried not to let it effect my performance. But, at times it probably did. I hope it didn't, but there are times that it probably did. In the mean time, it made me work harder because I wanted to show the bastards what a big mistake they were making. And I wanted someone to sit there and go, 'Man, this guy just works so hard.' I guess it was false hope on my part for somebody to just say, 'This guy's not going to break and this guy works really hard, let's let him earn it all over again. But it was false hope. It wasn't going to happen.

Clark: Was it frustrating for you when he sent you home? What did you do during that period?

Heyman: The first time when I was sent home, which was September 15, after the Macon TV taping, it was a great relief because I was already under investigation and they were already really busting my chops on the investigation. They were looking into everything. There was nothing to find, but still, it's an embarrassing situation when you're under investigation because they are accusing you of being a crook. It was humiliating. And I was dealing with the absolute dismantling of the Dangerous Alliance. And I was dealing with the fact that Steve Austin was suffering from being devalued because he was being managed by me. It took its toll on me. I felt it and it was just a miserable time. So when they sent me home, I was glad to go home. I mean, I was glad to get out of there. My life was a nightmare and I was given a chance to escape from it for awhile. I had a chance to come back home and rediscover my friends. I got to pet my dog everyday, who didn't even know me by the time I came home, he looked at me like I was a stranger. I got to rediscover New York again, which is a big thing for me.

Clark: While you were home, were you looking into different things and thinking about other interests?

Heyman: I was already hooked up with the William Morris agency here in New York, and I told the people there, who I work with, just give me a little time to recover from this trauma, and I'm going to be ready to explore other avenues. I was thinking about different things. I was mostly thinking about how I was going to survive this attack on my livelihood, this attack on my professional career, because they were coming at me from all sides. I was trying to fend them off as best I could. I mean, I was under investigation, I was under constant pressure, and two or three times a month there were different allegations that were being thrown at me, they were trying to get something that would stick.

Clark: What were some of the things that they were accusing you of?

Heyman: Because that deals with confidential conversations that I had with Bill Watts at that time and because a lot of those things can only be revealed if we have to go to trial, it would be unethical of me to repeat them on the record and/or for publication. But they accused me of so many different things and none of them had any, not even the slightest shred of merit to them. It was so blatantly false and it was clearly a lie. And even a couple of times they laughed when they accused me of it. But they just figured I might say something to slip up and they'd say, 'We got you now.' To reveal it now or to discuss it now would be unethical because (1) the person that accused me of it is no longer there to refute it, and (2) this is something that I don't know if the people above him are aware of it. I did complain to them once about it. They chose not to do anything about it. And if we go to trial, it is something that will probably come out. But for it to come out before the trial or for it to come out before the people above Bill Watts have the chance to rectify the situation, to correct this wrong, would be unfair to them because the people above Bill Watts right now have not had the ample opportunity to correct the situation regarding Paul E. Dangerously. If they choose to correct the situation- it was one man's actions- then Turner Broadcasting doesn't deserve the smear on its reputation because the executives above him corrected the situation. But yeah, I've thought of other of employment. I thought about career moves. The one thing that I did not think about, was leaving. I was determined not to be forced out. I was determined to survive this attack and it was that determination that started to get me restless when I was at home. That's when I started telling the people at the William Morris agency, 'Okay, I think I'm ready now to see what else is out there.' To explore some other options. Then, I got called back to work.

Clark: Why do you think he called you back to work?

Heyman: This is not a paranoid view of the offices, this was as far as I can tell, one man's actions. Because there were a lot of people in the creative end of WCW that wanted to showcase my abilities and my talent, or what I did well. There are a lot of people that have a lot more talent than me. I'm just saying there were people in that office that wanted to take what I do well and showcase it. They had some ideas and they got them through. We went with it. Plus, Bill wanted somebody to apparently go on TV and do inter-views about Erik Watts, to get the people behind Erik. And I was a natural adversary for Erik and by me going on the air to chastise Erik, theoretically, it would get the people behind the kid.

Clark: Were there ever times during this period where you were threatened, or your career, or your status in the business was threatened?

Heyman: I was told my career would be ruined. Flat out, straight out, no beating around the bush- I was told straight out, 'We will destroy your career.' I was told that because of the incident with Ric Flair (fight between the two when Flair was in an office position with WCW while wrestling) and because of the suspension, that I didn't want another blemish on my record and that if I had one, I would be labeled a chronic problem and who would want to touch me. It was constantly thrown in my face. I was constantly reminded that I have a 'borderline reputation' and that I would be labeled a problem and 'somebody who's difficult to do business with.' And that if I did not conform to his way, in their vernacular, that I would get this label and that I would suffer this fate and that I would be labeled a chronic problem and be ruined in the business.

Clark: Was there more than one person in WCW who said these things?

Heyman: Most of it came from Bill. I was warned by someone else- who was stuck in the middle and therefore there's no need for me to sit here and put blame on him- but he kept on warning me if I don't conform- what he meant was- if I didn't give in, that it would be a pissing contest which I would lose and I would be destroyed. I think the person who was telling me this was stuck in the middle and in a way was trying to warn me, 'Hey, this is what's coming up. Be careful.' So I don't want to drag him into this fight right now. He was told to tell me, 'You're going to get in trouble here. You better give in.' And this person also knew me well enough to know that I wasn't going to give in, because I was right. If I was wrong, if I felt this was fair- fine. It's not like I had any problem with where they wanted to take the company or take the Dangerous Alliance or take me. I could be an opening match manager or a main event manager. It's not my call, it's not my company to run. You can keep me at home or you can keep me on the road all the time. It's not my decision. I have no right to complain over how Paul E. Dangerously is presented. I might bitch about it to my friends, but that's just being a human being. I have no right to sit here and say, 'Oh, they didn't use me right, they didn't showcase me right.' That's being a whiner and a cry baby and that's just not accepting reality.

Clark: I guess it would be a tough situation for people who were under Bill Watts because they have to do what he says and...

Heyman: Yeah. He was a very demanding individual, which is fine in some aspects and in others, I can see a problem. I have no problems with a demanding boss, it's his company to run. He has a right to run it how he sees fit. It's a company that needed strong leadership. Make no mistake about it, he was a strong leader. I just don't agree with some of the policies that he instituted and I don't agree with some of the tactics that he used. I have a lot of friends in this business who have suffered because of it.

Clark: Did all of this strain any friendships or did you lose any friends?

Heyman: I've lost no friendships. If anything, it has brought a lot of us closer together. There are people whom I had falling outs with, and this situation has repaired our friendships. If anything, the one thing this has done is united a lot of people together. I have seen a side of some of these wrestlers, some of the people that I've been fortunate enough to work with, that I never knew existed. There were so many people who called me the day Bill Watts was fired. Some of whom I'd never thought I'd speak to again or would ever speak to me again. And a lot of whom who I expected to hear from. It was an overwhelming response, 'Have you heard the news?' I lost friendships in my personal life because of the stress that I was under and I reacted probably very badly to them. But business, I didn't lose any friendships, it brought a lot of us closer.

Clark: Now that all these people who were upset with what was going on with WCW have bonded together, do you think that if there's some proper direction it could turn into one hell of a positive thing because everyone has united or bonded together?

Heyman: Sure, oh yeah. I can imagine the morale level tonight. I know what morale was Wednesday night when the phone calls were coming in. People who had been going through tough times in their lives were calling up, 'Yippee ky yea.' They were just dancing in the streets. I'm not saying this to knock Bill Watts. I'm not saying that any of these people wish misfortune on anybody. Some of them do, some of them really do! But, not all of them. It's just that it's been a very difficult situation for a lot of people within this organization. And with this particular move, in my opinion, a lot of people have a sense of relief, a feeling that they have survived this time. Because a lot of the wrestlers did not believe they were going to survive this regime. They thought they'd be out, they'd be done. And now they have hopes that their careers are going to move. Some of them wish him misfortune, but not everybody. I'll be very honest with you, I have great compassion for his family who moved to Atlanta and now they've got to move back. For him, I have no compassion, but for his family, I do. I feel that for them, and I hope that makes me a better person than

him.

Clark: Earlier you said that you felt Kip Frey wasn't given enough time to accomplish anything. Do you feel Bill Watts was given enough of a chance? He didn't believe in the current system and he was making changes...

Heyman: He didn't believe in that system because he hadn't watched wrestling in five years, and he admitted that himself. That's not an opinion, that's a fact. He came in and said, 'I haven't watched this garbage in five years. And when I turned on the TV the other day as I was getting this job, I was shocked at what this business had become.' He'd watched scattered shows over the years. I remember once, it was a "Saturday Night" show where Barry Windham joined forces with Ron Simmons from Sioux City, Iowa. There was twelve minutes at the end of the show and Jim Ross and I reviewed the show. For twelve minutes we kept pitching back to different highlights. We were on the air seven minutes of the twelve pitching the clips of what had happened on that two hour show in an emergency taping the day before it went on the air, because there were twelve minutes in the show that needed to be filled. I remember the next week that Jim Ross was very, very proud because he had spoken to Bill Watts, and Bill said, 'This was your idea, Jim, and I could tell this was your concept and this wasn't your concept.' And Jim was very happy about it. And he even told me then, 'The Cowboy doesn't watch the shows a lot, but he watched this one.' Bill came in and he admitted that he hadn't really watched wrestling on any sort of a regular basis for five years, since he left the business. So how could he make any kind of assessment on the system when he wasn't familiar with it. When this guy left the business, PPV was a brand new thing and it hadn't reached its full potential. PPV was something that Turner was just getting into. How could he sit there and make an evaluation or a judgment of the system that he hadn't gotten himself familiar with yet. He couldn't have been disgusted with it because he didn't understand it.

Clark: But, do you feel that this move (Bill Watts' departure from WCW) will put WCW forward or do you think it will just cause even more chaos?

Heyman: It had to be done. It should have been done a long time ago. WCW has been in the chaotic state since he took over. It's been in crisis mode since June 1. Hopefully, they can now restore some sort of stability. I don't know if they can. I hope that they can. They certainly would not be able to do it under that structure which they had under that particular man.

Clark: It was just announced that Ole Anderson would be taking over the position of Bill Watts. Do you think that's a good change?

Heyman: I think any change from Bill Watts is a good change. That's not just because of my personal problems with Bill Watts. I don't want them to bring in a 110 year old drooling, senile, brain dead person. I'm just saying that Ole Anderson is an intelligent individual. Like every other man, he has made mistakes in his life. Hopefully, he's learned from them. If he has, he'll do well. If he hasn't, he won't. I think Ole is at a point in his life where he wants to succeed in this job. I think he needs to succeed in this job. He does not want to destroy his reputation like Bill, in my opinion, destroyed his own. I think Ole is going to be put to the task and hopefully, Ole will do a good job. I don't know. I'll judge the man by his record. He hasn't had a chance yet to have positives and negatives put on that record. It's a clean slate. He gets to start fresh now. I wish him luck.

Clark: You've been working for a long time with Jim Ross since coming to WCW and you probably learned a lot from him, and all the competitiveness...

Heyman: I learned a lot from Jim Ross. He really gave me the benefit of his experience and gave me the opportunity to learn from him. He taught me a lot. Jim Ross deserves a lot of credit for my success as a commentator because he took a lot of time to teach me a way, that I can understand, of analyzing a match. I went in as a commentator with a distorted view of what the job entailed. Jim Ross butted heads with me everyday and then I finally got it right. We used to scream at each other, but it was productive. Because I had an opinion and he wouldn't just say, 'No, no, no, that's not the way to do it. You've got to do it this way.' He listened to what I said and then he showed me what was wrong with my argument. By telling me how he perceived what I was saying and then telling me what was wrong with it, I understood that the man was listening to me, and not just arguing with me and butting heads. Evaluated it, disagreed with it, and this is why. I learned a lot from Jimbo. It was at his urging to Jim Herd that I was put on Halloween Havoc in 1990, it was at his urging to Jim Herd that I was put on Thanksgiving Thunder 1990. The company itself put me on "Pro Wrestling New York" but Jim was one of the people, along with Dusty, who pretty much made sure that I was put on "WCW Saturday Night." And Jim and I became a broadcast team. When they assigned him to "Power Hour" in Canada, he said, 'Well, I'll do it with Paul.' We did five hours of television a week together- four shows, five hours. The only show that he was doing without me was "Main Event" because he was doing that with 'Missy. We got very comfortable around each other. When it comes to bringing out the finer points in a match, he is tremendous, and you learn from that. Though, Jim and I have had our arguments, I cannot take away from the fact that I learned a lot about being a broadcaster from Jim Ross. Jim Ross taught me a lot about producing and deserves a

lot of credit for it.

Clark: What is your relationship with him today?

Heyman: Pretty much nonexistent, unfortunately. When you asked about losing friendships during the Bill Watts reign, that's one I should have mentioned. Not that we're enemies and not that there's hard feelings- at least I hope there's not- but our friendship has suffered through this. That's a shame. I have a lot of respect for how hard Jim Ross works. I have great admiration for how dedicated he is to his profession. He loves wrestling. And he loves being Jim Ross and he enjoys his job, and it shows in his performance. And I admire that. I hope I earned Jim Ross' respect as a broadcaster when I was one. But unfortunately, Jim was in a situation to where his hero, his idol, his mentor, was the boss. And Jim was put in a very powerful position and was involved in the business to an extent to where I couldn't go to him and say, 'Hey, this Bill Watts guy is really on my back.' So, we kind of got distanced in that way. There became a distance between Jim Ross and myself. That's because of the situation. And I never really wanted to butt heads with Jim Ross over the situation because it wasn't his fault and he didn't do it. We kind of stayed away from each other as the situation got worse because we knew where it would head. We knew that we would end up hating each other, and I didn't want to get into that situation with Jim. The situation we were in was bad enough and the animosity was growing to the point where we both knew it. We were both disturbed by it but there was nothing we could do about it.

Clark: Because of the positions you guys were in, because of the power structure of the company?

Heyman: Yeah, because of the power structure.

Clark: Are you upset about that? That the positioning of you guys effected a friendship? Do you find a lot of that in this business?

Heyman: This was a most unique situation. That put an inordinate amount of pressure on everybody involved. It hasn't happened all that much. I've lost a few friends in this industry over six years but not all that many. It happens in everyday life.

Clark: Was that a type of situation to where there might be a change in your relationship because of the happenings this week (Watts' departure)?

Heyman: Right now, I kind of avoid talking to anybody at all in an official capacity in that corporation because we're in a legal situation. It's a conflict of interest, unfortunately. Until this gets resolved, it put everybody in an uncomfortable situation because anything that he might say can be construed as evidence. And anything that I might say might be misconstrued as well, so it puts everybody in a difficult and compromising situation. We will probably have to wait until the legal situation is resolved. I enjoyed working with Jim because we didn't get along. That's the funny thing. I understood my role and he knew his. We legitimately did not get along on the air, and it was legit. We did not get along on the air, and we used it to our advantage. It made for interesting chemistry. One of the biggest responses we ever got- we got thousands of letters, we got more mail in those three weeks than we probably did during anything else that we did until Ric Flair left with the belt- was during the Sid Vicious-El Gigante feud. We got into shouting matches on the air. We would completely ignore the match and just start screaming at each other over who was the true giant in WCW. People enjoyed it. It worked. It was healthy. It added to the feud. The reason Jim Ross and I had such good chemistry on the air was because here's this guy from Oklahoma, from the south, a certain way of life, big football fan, and then me, I'm from New York, I'm from a different way of life, I grew up around a different crew of people, and I was raised in a different atmosphere. Plus, Jim Ross is fifteen years older than I am. We grew up in different periods. We had conflicting personalities. We used it to our advantage, so it lead to great chemistry.

Clark: Switching to a different subject, when did you first find out that WCW was investigating you?

Heyman: I found out about it in August. They went through every single item on every expense report I had ever turned in to that company. They searched, they looked for anything that could have the slightest discrepancy on it. It was a witch hunt.

Clark: I believe they accused you of falsifying expense reports at a hotel in Atlanta that you stayed at...

Heyman: We had all stayed for many years at a hotel in Atlanta called the Ramada Atlanta Airport South. It was formerly the Howard Johnson's. We stayed on Virginia Avenue at the Days Inn for a couple of years and then moved to this one because the management staff moved from the Days Inn to this particular establishment. It was common practice for many years for the wrestlers to check in under different names because a lot of fans know that we stay at the hotel, and you want a little privacy. It's

also common practice just to throw down the \$40, without even bothering about getting a receipt. Their argument was, 'Oh, you should have known to get receipts.' The point is that somebody else- it wouldn't be fair to mention a name- once stayed at the Marriott and it was \$55. They disallowed the reimbursement because they said, 'You can stay for \$37.50 or \$38,' whatever it was, 'At the Ramada and that's all we're going to pay you to stay in Atlanta on a night.' So theoretically, I could have stayed at the Hyatt Suites for \$350 a night, but they were only going to give me \$38 to stay in Atlanta that night. So it didn't matter where I was staying. I was only going to get \$38. The rest was up to me. But, I did stay there. It's common practice to just go in there and throw down the \$40, get your 6am wake-up call to catch your flight, and take off. It didn't matter because that's all they were going to give you to stay there anyway. So, I never really bothered with the receipts. When I turned it in, they said, 'Well, we need a receipt.' I said, 'Well, how about I just get you a letter from the hotel.' 'Oh, that would be fine.' If that wasn't good enough, right then and there, I would have realized this reimbursement has been disallowed. I screwed up, I didn't get the receipts. No problem, I'm out a grand, and that's all there is to it. It's not worth haggling over and it's certainly not worth blowing this kind of a contract over. But, they said, 'Give us a letter and that would be sufficient.' So, I brought back a letter from the general manager of the hotel. Now, they said this was unacceptable. I said, 'Well, forget it then. Just give me the rest of my expenses and we'll just forget about this one.' No big deal. I wasn't willing to make a big deal out of it because to me it just wasn't worth the hassle. So, the next thing I know, they are looking into all my expense reports desperately trying to find something. Somebody came to the realization that, hey, if they check in under different names and he didn't get the cash receipts, then if we ask for Paul Heyman or Paul E. Dangerously's receipts, there won't be any on the record. Because he checks in under a different name. Now, on any given night, four guys are Joe Blow. I've used the name Joe Blow. I know of several other wrestlers who have checked in under the name of Joe Blow, or Matt Burns, or Mark Green. So they go in there and they said, 'We'd like all of Paul Heyman's and Paul E. Dangerously's records.' Well, I probably checked in under that name once or twice. And so they said, 'Well, he didn't stay here.' The investigators were probably never made aware of the fact, by the people in the wrestling company who had ordered this investigation, that we stay under pseudonyms. And the investigators had no way of knowing because they're used to investigating an executive who goes on the road for three or four days, twelve times a year. And therefore, is going to keep much better and more immaculate and much different records than me, who's on the road 250 days a year. Obviously, my records are always going to be in different condition because I'm on the road 250 days a year. These investigators did not know of this policy or of this practice, so obviously, they did not find my receipts. Even when this information was given to Bill Watts, he didn't say, 'Oh by the way, he stayed under different names.' I had already made them aware of that fact and the general manager of the hotel told the investigators this. And then the order was given to the investigators to go above the general manager, to go to the owners. The owners of the hotel don't know the day to day operations of the hotel, so they don't know that the wrestlers check in under different names. They just know that a bunch of wrestlers stayed there. These are the owners. They look at the ledgers every Friday and go, 'We're making money' or 'We're losing money. They don't know how the hotel is run day to day. So, on January 14, I was supposed to have received, as I do every other Thursday via Federal Express, my payroll check. It didn't come. And I called up the comptroller Bryan Mitchels and asked him where my check was. He told me that he was under orders to hold my check. I couldn't get anybody on the phone, and they had just done the Clash in Milwaukee the night before, they were on the way back from Milwaukee, so I couldn't get a hold of Bill Watts. I called Jim Ross- my immediate supervisor, because contractually I'm also an announcer, and he was the lead announcer- and I said, 'Jim, where's my check.' He went into Bryan Mitchels and was pretty much told to stay out of it. Jim called me back and said, 'I don't know what's going on and I was told to tell you if you have a problem, call the Turner attorneys.' Well, I knew something was going down. I called Bill Shaw's office and I called Bob Dhue's office, and Bob Dhue called me back and said he had no knowledge of it and that he would look into it and call me first thing in the morning. The next morning, he did call me back and informed me that Bill Watts was presented some documentation by the Turner investigator of the fact that I was not registered under the name of Paul Heyman or Paul E. Dangerously and therefore Bill Watts is claiming that I attempted to defraud the company and that I was being fired. And that they were going to Federal Express my letter of termination and my final payroll check to me. I asked him to Fax me it as well so I could go to work on this right away. And he Faxed it to me.

Clark: In terms of what your contract stated, did they fire you correctly?

Heyman: By my reading, by my father's reading- he's an attorney whose opinion I obviously respect, by my New York attorney Bruce Gold's reading, by my Atlanta attorney Henry Bower's reading, by the reading of an attorney who used to work within the Turner system, no they did not fire me properly as I had- without breaking any confidentiality clause that's in my contract- it is pretty common knowledge that I'm afforded a certain amount of time of termination and a certain amount of severance pay which is over half a year. And they did not give me that. They terminated the entire contract, effective immediately on January 15- in my opinion and all the attorneys that I'm consulted, in their opinion- illegally. They have

yet to fire me correctly. They can't even fire me right.

Clark: What action did you take from there?

Heyman: My attorney immediately Faxed a letter down to them informing them of this situation. Saying, hey, you made a big mistake here. Obviously someone has not communicated to someone else the fact that Paul used several different names to check in at the hotel, as did many other people. We have statements attesting to the fact that I stayed there from people who work at the hotel, from several members of the organization- there are members of the office staff that I roomed next to for over a week. There's one member of the office staff who I roomed next to on at least ten different occasions- of the office staff of WCW. So, we denied the allegations and we brought to their attention a few facts. And told them this was a mistake on their part and that we'd like for them to correct it. And they refused. And we again afforded them the opportunity to correct the situation, the next week, and they refused. They left me with no other alternative than to engage counsel in Atlanta to pursue this matter because this type of allegation can completely destroy your reputation and your professional standing. I being 27 years old, have many more years that I have to make a living, whether it be in wrestling or somewhere else. They have severely impeded on my ability to do so. So, we have to answer this. We're going to fight this with everything that we've got, because it's wrong. This is the truth. If I did it, I'd take it on the chin, say, 'I got caught.' But, I would not lie because I would've deserved it. If I was imbecilic enough to jeopardize \$200,000 plus for the \$1,162.50, than I'm a schmuck and I would have deserved it. But, I didn't do it. I clearly, blatantly did not do it. It is a lie. It is a falsehood. It is 100% untrue. And therefore, I have to fight it. Not just because of the money that has been stolen from me, not just because my professional standing and reputation has been raped, but because they have really put a terrible terrible smear on my record that I don't know if I could ever recover from if I don't answer it. They've left me with no other alternative, but to go to the lawyers and say fight this. I've tried to resolve this amicably. I have letters via certified mail that I sent to Bill Watts in December when he put me in the five rematches with Madusa, imploring him to stop these hostilities and to start letting me either do my job or leave me alone. Almost pleading with him to let me contribute to the product, because the product needed help. I'm not just talking in front of the camera, I was willing to do anything to help WCW. I tried to defuse this situation with him but he just would not do it. I had phone conversations with him and me saying, 'Let's just stop this headbutting. This pissing contest needs to end.' But, it didn't work. He was like a shark that smelled blood. He was tenacious as a bulldog, he just would not let up. He was relentless. They destroyed my reputation. They've put a blemish on my record that I don't know that I could ever recover from. I'm going to answer these charges. I'm going to prove that this allegation is wrong and what they did to me is atrocious.

Clark: What stage is your lawsuit in?

Heyman: They will receive information regarding our claim this week. As I speak to you, it's this coming Monday or Tuesday (2/15 or 2/16) depending on the holiday. But, it will be the earlier part of this week that they will receive information.

Clark: What are the things in the lawsuit that you're suing them for?

Heyman: What I'm at liberty to disclose right now is obviously wrongful termination, obviously because they destroyed my career and then fired me- professional disparagement, and ethnic discrimination.

Clark: What is your basis for suing them for ethnic discrimination?

Heyman: I'll tell you straight out. I was a victim of an anti-Semitic tirade by Bill Watts.

Clark: And this lawsuit is against WCW?

Heyman: Yeah. He managed the company. He was their acting agent. It can't be just against Bill Watts. He did it as an officer of the company.

Clark: What kind of an anti-Semitic tirade were you a victim of?

Heyman: Bill Watts told me, and this is a quote, 'Why don't you go back to New York to your Jew f _____' lawyers because you all belong together, anyway.'

Clark: Was this during a time that you were trying to work something out with him?

Heyman: This was during a day that I had to do interviews about my Clash of the Champions match with Madusa. Bill Watts, because Jake Roberts had checked himself into rehab, got real mad the day that Jake did it, and just started to find outlets for his aggression. And decided after a week, to fine me for calling Madusa a hooker and a bitch at Halloween Havoc. Well, it's his prerogative to fine me, but not under those circumstances. So, I protested it and I sent him a letter explaining my

side of the story. And I told him that if he didn't agree with me, I'd like to know the grievance procedure. I'd like a hearing. I'd like a meeting. I'd like to sit down with him and discuss this and just inform me of the grievance procedures. And he pulled me aside in Gainesville, Georgia, and said, 'There are no grievance procedures. You won't get a hearing. You won't get a meeting. It's my decision. I'm the head honcho. And that's all their is to it.' I said, 'Well, Bill, you don't even want to hear me out?' He said, 'No, I don't. I don't want to hear anybody out. I'm the head honcho here and I do what I want to do.' And he had made a statement to *The Pro Wrestling Torch* during the time when they split up Bobby Eaton, Arn Anderson, and myself. So, here I was. I was down and he kicked me when I was down, because he labeled me a scatterbrained and a non-conformist. I'm many things in life, I don't agree with that assessment. And I said, 'So you can do anything you want. Does that include label me a scatterbrained and a non-conformist?' And he said to me, 'What do you care what the f--- I say to them. They're your buddies anyway.' Well, the last time a quote from me was printed in any trade paper- whether it be *The Observer* or *The Torch* or anything- was when I had done *The Torch Annual* at Bill Watts' request, and that was back at the end of July. That was just a very basic discussion of the fundamentals of the wrestling business. It was a very simple discussion that you could have read in any one of Apter's magazines. It was nothing like what he had given. So, here he is labeling me a scatterbrained and a non-conformist, and I said, 'Hey, they're your buddies more than mine. You talk to them a hell of a lot more than I get the opportunity to. You're quoted every week.' He said, 'I never gave them a f--- interview.' And I had happened to have with me *The Torch Annual* that he gave with all the racist remarks. And I reached into my bag, because I was reading it. I said, 'Why don't you explain this to me?' And I read him the quotes of the racist remarks that he had given. And he was furious. He said, 'Where did you get that, where did you... You have no right to have that.' I said, 'I got it because I bought it.' 'But you have no right to have that.' 'Why don't I have a right to have it?' You said it, he printed it, and I bought it. I paid \$9 for it. 'Aah, you f---, why don't you go back to New York to your Jew f--- lawyers because you all belong together.' He turned around and walked off. He made similar anti-Semitic remarks to me on numerous other occasions, but none in front of witnesses, and this one was done in front of witnesses. I haven't disclosed the other ones because they were done behind closed doors and then it's just a swearing contest between me and him- yes he said it, no I didn't. There's no way for me to prove it, so there's no sense in me alleging it. I'm not going to get into that kind of a contest with him. But, he did this one in front of witnesses and there were people that heard it. And therefore, I'm bringing it up.

Clark: So, before you filed your lawsuit, you made WCW aware of this?

Heyman: Yes. They are fully aware of the circumstances involving this and they're fully aware of the fact that I stayed at the hotel and they're all aware of the facts pertaining to this case. Like I said, Bill Watts, as we conduct this interview, has just resigned two days ago. They have not had ample opportunity to correct this situation. I don't know if they will, maybe they will. Now that Mr. Watts is out of the way, maybe this gives them the opportunity to correct this situation. I would assume that it's in the best interest of Turner Broadcasting, for them to do so.

Clark: For your future, would you like to work something out with WCW and go back to work for them?

Heyman: For my future, my only concern is to clear my name. Once my name is cleared, then, whatever the best option is for me- whether it be in the wrestling business or outside the wrestling business- I'll have to explore the option and I'll have to evaluate all the situations that are available to me. But to me, first and foremost, I want to clear my name because I feel I need to. Once I do clear my name, I'll assess all the options that are available to me and which one I feel will be the best in the long run for my career.

Clark: Does the WWF interest you a lot?

Heyman: Of course. They're the leader in the industry right now. And it's a place that I've never worked. I'm very curious about how I would do there. They have a show right now that interests me greatly- "Monday Night Raw." It has all the elements of stuff that I have a lot of experience in. It's a New York show. Obviously, the success of "Pro Wrestling New York" and what producing I did on that show and what announcing I did on that show would lend to the fact that I have a track record of success in this market. It's in a small arena/large studio. I was a co-host of the Saturday night show which means I did a lot of performances at Center Stage. I understand that sort of audience participation, probably more so than a lot of people in the WWF because Center Stage in a unique situation. A lot of guys in WWF are used to these ten to twenty thousand seat venues and the people that are coming in from Memphis to commutate there, are used to that hundred people in the studio. Well, I'm used to that eight to twelve hundred seat small arena/ large studio because that's what Center Stage is. I applied my trade there for a while and I really understand that audience participation. Plus, with it being a live show and spontaneous and off the cuff, with it being in the New York market, with it kind of being geared towards New York, with it being in that particular type of an atmosphere, I would think, in my opinion, that I would be an asset to their production and their presentation of "Monday Night Raw." If nothing else, that show

greatly interests me. It has caught my eye. It is something that I would really like to get involved in. I might not fit into their plans, I don't know. I have not spoken to the WWF, I have not spoken to Titan Sports. And won't until the situation is cleared up. There's a lot of other things there that would interest me as well. It's not the only opportunity that's there, but it is the one that I see myself in and it's the one that interests me the most. Not to say that I wouldn't want something else or accept something else, I'm just saying that's something that I see and gets my heart pounding the hardest and gets my thought process moving the quickest because it has captured a great deal of my interest. The opportunity to work with some extremely talented people who are there, the opportunity to learn from a whole new batch of people, it's a whole new ballgame. I would love to learn from Vince McMahon, I would love to learn from Pat Patterson, I would love to learn from J.J. Dillon, I would love to learn from Bruce Prichard- whom I've known for years and whose intelligence in this business is greatly respected by everyone, I would love to learn from just the people in the WWF whom I've never had the opportunity to work with. I would love, I would cherish the opportunity to learn from Bobby Heenan. I mean, this is a man- and this is no knock on Jim Cornette or Sherri Martel or anybody else, and I certainly hope that any one of my peers or my colleagues do not take offense to this statement, especially Cornette or Sherri- but Bobby Heenan is the greatest manager ever in this business. Not only because he drew so much money and not because of interview skills and not because of what he can do at the ring, simply because he's done it for over 25 years and done it successfully for all 25. The guy is phenomenal... The longevity. He's the Johnny Carson of wrestling. Nobody had a run like Bobby in that particular job. The opportunity to learn from Bobby would be something that I would want to take full advantage of. He's a guy who I admire greatly and whose work I look up to and admire and would love to learn from. So I mean, there are a lot of different things in the WWF that really appeal to me. There's also the drawbacks and there's also the downsides. It's not my only option.

Clark: I think it's really neat to hear the enthusiasm from you about learning things from different human beings.

Heyman: Well, thank you. I don't ever hear a group of people ever say, 'Paul E. Dangerously- my god, Jim Cornette doesn't hold a candle to him' or 'Paul E. Dangerously- Bobby Heenan couldn't hold his jock strap!' Until that's the consensus opinion and until that is 100% true, then you have to keep learning. And even then, there's still more to learn because somebody is going to be coming up that path to take you. It's like Mike Tyson. This guy became the ultimate boxing machine. And as soon as he knew it all, bam, he gets knocked out. Muhammad Ali is acknowledged as probably the greatest boxer of all-time, but even he took his falls because he stopped growing, he stopped learning. If you become complacent in your job or in the amount of knowledge that you have, then that's it, there's nothing else to shoot for. That is why so many men go through that mid-life crisis when they're 45 and they go buy a Corvette and they go for a new career. They're bored because there is nothing left to accomplish. They've accomplished everything and they're done. So, they want to start all over. Trust me, because I've been there, no matter how great success you achieve, it can all be taken away from you tomorrow. I was the most exposed color commentator in this business and it was taken away from me in one day. I was the most heavily promoted manager in WCW history- I was promoted as hard and as vehemently as the WWF ever promoted Bobby Heenan- and WCW put everything behind the promotion of Paul E. Dangerously and the Dangerous Alliance, and it was taken away from me. So, you can never be in a situation where you can sit there and say I'm untouchable or I'm so hot, so big, or I'm so important that they could never take me down. They can take you down in a heart beat. The only way to continue on after they do such a thing or the only way to prevent it or the only way to fight it, is to learn. I enjoy knowledge and once you stop learning or once you ever get the feeling that there's nothing left to learn, you're a dead man. You could spend 200 years in this business, you still have something to learn. Especially me, I have a constant need to learn. There are people that I would just love to learn from, it's a whole new perspective. There are things about WCW that still interest me. I'm not done learning from Arn Anderson. I'm not done learning from Rick Rude. I'm not done learning from Steve Austin. And I don't want to be done yet. There are things that entice me in all the organizations.

Clark: What are some of the options outside of the wrestling business that you're looking into now?

Heyman: There have been some opportunities. I haven't had the chance to explore them since this firing came about simply because I've been very preoccupied with clearing my name and with getting this thing in motion. It's something I have to take very seriously now because my career in wrestling could be over, unfortunately. I hope it's not, but it theoretically could be. I've had a couple auditions for some hosting jobs, I had done the auditions before being fired. I was accepted. A couple of them I couldn't accept because they would have conflicted with a potential WCW scandal. One of them I had to turn down very recently because I'm involved in this legal situation with WCW and don't want to immediately jump into something because I don't know where this is headed or if my name will be cleared in time. They had asked me about that. I'm looking at a lot of different things and obviously might have to look a lot more aggressively in the near future if I find that I don't

have a future in wrestling. Broadcasting or a career in front of the camera is something that does appeal to me. I've had the opportunity to audition and win the hosting spot on an alternative music program, On Cue, a rockumentary show which will be syndicated. I had the opportunity to be involved in the casting process of Monster Trucks, which for several different reasons did not get involved in. And there are other shows both television and radio which are of interest to me. But right now, I've just been so wrapped in clearing my name that I haven't really had the chance to sit down and ponder what I'm going to do next.

Clark: What have you learned about life through all these experiences?

Heyman: Sure. You always have to make the most of a situation. And as devastating, and as heartbreaking, and as unbearable as this situation has been, if you don't at least profit by gaining knowledge from it, then the bastards win. I'm not saying anybody in WCW is a bastard, you know, the bastards meaning the world, people who want you to fail. I try my damnest to learn from good situations and learn from bad situations. It's harder when the situations are bad because you resent the fact that, I've got to learn from this? But, you learn from them and you go on. I think it's one of the most important lessons that I've learned from this- is no matter what, you go on and you don't just crumble, and you don't crack, and you don't let it break you. And it would be very easy to slip into a depression or to just get very angry after you've been through something like this: I'd rather take that anger and that aggression and that hurt and turn it into something positive- turn it into motivation or turn it into energy for thoughts and for ideas and to use it to my advantage and to learn from this. The biggest lesson I've learned is no matter what, you just go on, you keep fighting. If you're right, you fight until you win, and you keep going on with your life.

INTERVIEW SHANE DOUGLAS

The following interview that was published in issue #30 with Shane Douglas (Troy Martin) was conducted via telephone from his home outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on June 9, 1993.

Clark: Going back to your days in the NWA, why do you think ultimately The Dynamic Dudes tag team had a tough time getting over and then why did you wind up leaving the NWA?

Douglas: The first thing was, plain and simple, the organization. Originally, Johnny Ace and I were supposed to be called The New Generation. They were trying to captivate the same audience that The Rock & Roll Express captured, but it had grown so old that they couldn't keep that same audience captivated, or capture the new people in that age group, the tweens. When they first put us together, we wrestled on our first pay-per-view WrestleWar '89 as The New Generation. And Jim Herd, in his infinite wisdom, and I say that very sarcastically, came up with this idea for the name The Dynamic Dudes. When Eddie Gilbert first told it to me, I thought it was a rib and I laughed about it for about five minutes, and I realized that Eddie wasn't laughing with me. I said, "You're serious, aren't you?" And he said, "I'm serious as a heart attack." I went to everybody. I went to Jim Herd, I went to Ric Flair, I went to everybody that was involved in that damn booking committee. All of them, like f--kin' idiots without a brain, couldn't give me an answer. Nobody would make a decision. Ultimately, I think that was the first step that kept the Dudes down. The Dudes weren't packaged right to get over. But, the Dudes sold more gimmicks, we were second only behind Sting, but we sold more than Ric Flair, we sold more than The Road Warriors, we sold more than anybody else there. I think simply that was because there was a sector of people out there that were behind us that wanted us to be pushed. But, they'd push us for a week and then next week they'd have us get beat by somebody. There was no consistency. My point has always been, if you want to push somebody, push them, if you want to beat them, beat them, but don't mix it up because that just spins the wheels of the company. I think that's ultimately what led to the downfall of the Dudes. Plus, they sugar-coated us. I'm a wrestler by heart. I've been involved in athletics forever, and I wanted to be a wrestler. I didn't want to go out on a skateboard, but they demanded that the skateboards be used. They used that sugar-coating to the point where if I were sitting in the audience, I'd be saying, "Get these faggots out of here. I don't want to see this." So the way that they sugar-coated it and packaged it, they doomed it from the start. What ultimately led to my decision to leaving was, I simply couldn't work for people like that anymore. They had that damn booking committee and you couldn't get an answer out of anybody. It was, "Oh, go ask Jim Barnette," or "Go ask Jim Herd," or "Go ask Jim Ross." Or you'd have to go ask Ric Flair or Jim Cornette or Kevin Sullivan. I mean, the fingers were pointing every which way but me. To me, part of leadership, and I studied management when I was in college, true leaders, true management people are the people that stand up and say, "Okay, the buck stops here. I'll take the responsibility for it. Nobody in NWA at that time would do that and it just drove me nuts to deal with people like that, small-minded, uneducated people. At that point, I told Johnny Ace and we sat down and talked about it. He didn't want me to leave. I said, "I can't stay here anymore." I couldn't go in the ring every night and do my job and do it with an enthusiasm that was expected of the Dudes to do. I just thought it was too juvenile. Let's draw the comparison. The Rock & Roll Express, they were

allowed to be ass kickers. I don't think there was a person in the stands that believed that Robert Gibson or Ricky Morton were tough ass kickers. But, they were allowed to go out and exude that persona, and so the people got behind them. I mean, the people really began to believe they were ass kickers. Well, the Dudes weren't allowed to do that. The Dudes had to go out and do the wave sign and do the rip off the pants and smile to the camera. We were never allowed to show any kind of a vicious side. In fact, there were times that we were told point blank, "You were too hard in that match. Go out and do it again." The reason for that was we weren't involved again in that clique. Ric Flair, Jim Cornette and Kevin Sullivan were the big three in that clique. Pushing the Dudes didn't do a thing to keep Ric Flair, so we didn't get any support from him. Pushing the Dudes for Jim Cornette didn't do anything for him because he had his Midnight Express, so he did everything to hold us down. And Kevin Sullivan was into his stupid-ass witchcraft devil bullshit that didn't draw a dime, so he didn't do anything for us. Ultimately, the Dudes were sunk from the very beginning because we had no allies in powerful positions and they just kept us under from the very start. It's a shame because, like even Brian Pillman, the last time I was down on the road, we were talking about it and he laughed because they missed the boat on us. Because from the very first time they put us together before they started beating us, the marks were getting with us and they were believing in us, and that was evident in the fact that we were selling t-shirts more so than the world champion, more so than the world tag team champions. But, they nipped in the butt by beating us in and out and never giving us a solid support.

Clark: Would you say one of the main reasons why the NWA/ WCW has been treading water for the past several years is because of the lack of leadership there?

Douglas: Oh my God, yes. Bill Watts came in and he tried running the place with a strong hand. Bill Watts' problem is, he's a wrestler and not a management person. He came in and instead of saying, "Excuse me, listen, these are the decisions that need to be made," he'd come in and say, "Listen here, you mother f--ker, it's this way or you can f--kin' leave." When you tell somebody in TBS who is an educated person that, you made an enemy. And they're thinking to themselves, "What kind of asshole do we have hired here." But he was what WCW needed and he's what they need. He's a strong hand that can come in and tell people what needs to be done. The problem is, he takes it to an extreme, so he gets no support from anybody. But, yes, definitely, the problem there has been that they've got people who think they're leaders, people who want to be leaders, but when it comes time to take any heat or make a tough decision, they don't have a leader anywhere to be found. You look at Dusty Rhodes and try to think of any tough decision he ever made or put his ass on the line for any kind of heat, he never did it. Ole Anderson sure as hell won't do it. Grizzly Smith won't do it. Mike Graham won't do it. Barry Windham won't do it, he runs from heat. Ultimately, especially in a business like wrestling that is cut-throat, there are times that tough decisions need to be made and there's nobody there to make them. Ultimately, the people in TBS are the people who should be making the decisions, but they don't know a damn thing about wrestling, and they're listening to people like Dusty Rhodes. So it's really a case of the blind leading the blind and the inept leading the inept. And it's going to continue to go on. The company is not going to draw a dime. For some reason the company keeps sending me a booking sheet. I sat with my wife and laughed. I looked at the booking sheet and on some towns it's Dick Slater vs Junkyard Dog on top. And then I thought, "Who in the world is going to pay a dime to see that?" And I can answer it for you. Nobody. That's the reason they are going to have 25 people sitting in the audience and they're sinking it again. In lieu of going with the young talent that Watts had started doing, and at the time that we started seeing that, you can correlate it and see that the stands were filling up, the buildings were coming up, the numbers went up. It wasn't an overnight thing, but each time we went to a building, it went higher and higher. Now they're back on the downside. And the only difference being is, instead of the young guys being pushed like they were, now they're bringing the Dick Slaters and the Junkyard Dogs and the Ric Flairs back. I've got nothing personally against any of those guys, but as far as being a money draw, they're beyond that.

Clark: Regarding your recent stint in WCW, many observers and wrestlers saw a tremendous improvement in your ring work during that time. What do you feel were the main reasons for your vast improvement?

Douglas: I think it was a combination of a lot of things. I think it was the fact that I've been in the business for almost nine years. I think it was the fact that I was able to learn. The fact that I was with Ricky Steamboat certainly didn't hurt. The fact that I was wrestling with some great wrestlers instead of preliminary people on a nightly basis. I think all those things certainly led to help. The sad part was, I was never really allowed to express myself fully. In this business today, it takes six months from the day that you're first seen to get over and before the people really begin to get behind you and believe in you. Ole Anderson seems to think that in six months time you're burnt out. The basic philosophical difference is of their mentality versus the mentality of other people that try to make the business go. He thinks in six months it's time for you to leave and somebody else come in. That constant overturn of talent simply means the people sitting at home never get a chance to get with anybody. Just as soon as they start to, they go, "Oh my God, now they're gone. Now I'll have to find somebody else. Okay, I'll go with this guy." And in six months, he's gone. So they really can't form any allegiances, and that's what makes people come

to buildings, when they get behind somebody. Speaking from experience, when I was a mark, I grew up watching Bruno Sammartino, to me Bruno was "the man." And so I went to watch him in Pittsburgh every month because I knew that he had a tough fight on his hands and I had to be up there to support him. Well, there's nobody like that for people to get behind today because they're gone. Just when they get a chance to say, "Ricky Steamboat & Shane Douglas, they're a damn good tag team, I'm going to get behind them," then they're broken up. So now they're looking for somebody else. And it's sure as hell they're not going to get behind Ric Flair and Arn Anderson. As much as I love both those guys, Ric Flair looks terrible, he's over-the-hill. Arn's 30 pounds overweight. It's like looking at Ali, now. Ali was the greatest boxer of all time, but you sure don't want to see him climb in the ring today. It's the same thing with Flair and Anderson and that whole group of guys. WCW is making a fatal mistake in 1993 by bringing back that old talent and hoping to draw money out of it. It didn't draw three years ago. That will be the death nail in the coffin of WCW, if they continue to push that talent and not draw any new talent.

Clark: With your situation with Ricky Steamboat, the gimmick was that he was an experienced wrestler working with a young, up and coming talent. Was that what it was really like legitimately, and what was it like for you to work with him?

Douglas: Oh, the thing about is that it was completely legitimate. The people realized that Shane Douglas was not on par with Ricky Steamboat. I mean, he's a 17 year veteran. I was an 8 or 9 year veteran. And the people didn't even realize that I was an 8 year veteran because I've been in and out of wrestling so much. It was the Rocky story. It was the tag team that wasn't supposed to get over, that got over. It was the tag team that got over in spite of the fact that WCW didn't let it get over. It was a tag team that people looked at and said, "Hey, these are two clean-cut guys. Two guys that aren't obviously steroided to the gills, that aren't drug users. They're both educated. Ricky Steamboat is known world wide for his strong family values and here's Shane Douglas known as a teacher. You don't come across as a tag team with the painted faces and the gimmicks. That was one of the things I told Ole Anderson. I said, "You know, Ole, it's funny. All Ricky Steamboat and I had to offer is that we're good wrestlers. And imagine that, good wrestlers in the wrestling business, it'd be like being a good baseball player in baseball. We don't paint our faces, we don't wear stupid looking outfits. We just go out and we wrestle. And the people were getting behind us." It's been a long time since the fans have seen a 55 minute match, and been able to get the story being told in that match. And that's also a testament to Brian Pillman and Steve Austin, that we had good matches. But, that is so seldom to see today. There are the million dollar boys—Sting and Vader, and all those guys—they cannot do that 55 minute match. Bill Watts tried to take wrestling back to wrestling, and that was what Ole said he was going to do. Some place along the line they lost that philosophy because they decided to go back with the guys that were the 7-minute-men that could wrestle for 7 or 8 minutes, and that was it, they'd go out there with no story told and there was no philosophy and no psychology towards the matches. It was just, "I'll beat you up, you beat me up, and then we'll take the match home, and that will be it." But, Steamboat taught me the psychology of the match. I don't think there is any argument that Steamboat is probably the best, not only right now but probably of all time, as far as psychology goes in a ring. I was fortunate to be able to be with him and learn that. As far as what kind of experience it was, being a student for all my life and being a teacher now, to me it was like picking up a book every night and reading it. A "How to be a Wrestler" book. I watched him every night in the ring and I think to myself, "My God, why didn't I do it that way before?" So I learned from him every night, and I think after six months of being with him, I think I'm five times the wrestler that I was six months ago before we started teaming. Again, unfortunately, we weren't in the clique. Rick wasn't in the clique with somebody in the office and I wasn't in a clique with somebody, so ultimately, we got pushed to the backside in lieu for Dustin Rhodes and the Barry Windhams and the Erik Watts and the other people that were in the clique. And that was unfortunate for WCW. I'm not saying just for us. There's a ton of talent in WCW that's being grossly overlooked—Brad Armstrong, Tom Zenk, people that are great wrestlers, very, very athletic, look good, but because they're not in that clique and the nepotism doesn't kick in for them, they'll be preliminary guys. And that is not right.

Clark: It looked like you were excited to be at WCW and interested in learning and improving and you guys had the some of the best matches. Do you think WCW noticed that or appreciated that?

Douglas: The TBS people, no, I don't think they understood it. I think they're being led blind by the people like the Dusty Rhodes' and those people. I think they're taking what they say as gospel truth. And the funny thing about that is, Dusty Rhodes and Ole Anderson both have a history with WCW for having run it into the ground. If I give you my store, and I say to run it for me, and you run it into the ground almost to bankruptcy, I can't imagine me giving it to you a year from now. I don't see me getting it back on its feet and saying, "Here, go ahead and take it again and see what you do with it this time." That shows their philosophy. That shows where they're screwed up. They supposedly read *The Wrestling Observer*, and we always had great write-ups on our matches. I think a lot of times I was put across as being a troublemaker in the dressing room because I would say what was on my mind. Ricky would do the same thing. Point blank, we weren't ass-kissers. All we

would do is go out and do our match and do it well every night and bust our ass, and we were fortunate enough to work with people that did the same thing. Pillman and Austin were the two most disgruntled people about hearing that Ricky and I were being split up, and that I was leaving, because to them, they were losing their workout partners also. And now, unfortunately, they're going to be fed to Arn and Ric, and I think it's a shame because they're a much better tag team. Let's face it, in every sport, the greats get old and it's time for somebody else to come and move in. It's happened through the history of baseball, football, hockey, soccer, basketball, boxing, it doesn't matter what sport you look at. For some reason, in wrestling, you can't get rid of those old-timers. It's like getting rid of AIDS. They're like a plague that you cannot get rid of. To me, I wouldn't want to be 43 years old, stepping into the ring, and people going, "Boy, he used to be great." To me, that would be embarrassing. I want people sitting down and looking to say, "Man, Shane Douglas is a great wrestler, and he was smart enough to step aside when he was no good anymore." But, they don't see that and they're trying to hold onto that one last cheer from the crowd or that one last paycheck or whatever, and it's sort of sad.

Clark: Did it frustrate you a lot that you know you improved so much and that your matches were getting over all the time, but that you really weren't being appreciated?

Douglas: Sure, oh yeah. It was very frustrating for me because at the time I was renegotiating my contract, and I was the lowest paid man in the company, and to see that a Dustin Rhodes or an Erik Watts would go out and get paid more money than me because of who they were and not what they were in the ring, was very frustrating for me. Like I said, being educated, I was always ready for the work ethic—"The better you are, the better you'll be paid." In every other major sport you have that type of pay system. Barry Bonds in the best baseball player in baseball, he gets paid the best. But to see because Rick and I weren't involved in the clique, we weren't the partiers, we didn't go out and party with Dusty Rhodes at the bar until 2 a.m. or go to the country western bar and make fools out of ourselves, we'd go back to our hotel room. We weren't afforded the opportunity to get pushed. That is the one thing that will kill wrestling today. That was one thing that was missing 20 years ago. There were people that were involved that were friends with the booker and stuff like that, but it sure as hell wasn't as nepotistic as it is today, just from what Domenic and Bruno tells me. And they see it today, and they laugh at the sport. They really found it amazing that there's athletes involved in the sport that can't get pushed because of that. Because in their day, if you were a good wrestler, the promoter would see that, and you were picked up. But, it's changed.

Clark: From all the things you've said about the way WCW runs their company, how would you see that differing from the way Vince McMahon runs the WWF?

Douglas: First of all, Vince McMahon is the man in charge in WWF. In WCW, I dare you to find a person that's in charge. Vince McMahon is a businessman. And he doesn't have a son that's wrestling. He's not as nepotistic from what I've seen from working with him. He looks at a guy like Mr. Perfect, and says, "Mr. Perfect can bust his ass the ring, can have great matches, and can draw me money. Push him." There's none of that stuff. "Well, he's my best friend's son, he can't wrestle a lick, but we're going to push the guy because he's my best friend's son." He doesn't do that. That is basically the only difference between the two companies. One goes with talent because they know it will draw and the other goes with talent because they know somebody. And that's never worked in any business and it certainly won't work in a sport where the people are looking for excitement.

Clark: Do you think that side of the wrestling business is really out of touch of reality, or do you think that's pretty common in America?

Douglas: No, I think that's as backwards. The car industry in this country almost lost its ass because they were trying to tell Americans what kind of cars they wanted instead of listening to what kind of cars they wanted, and making the kind of cars that they wanted. In wrestling, in WCW especially, they're looking and saying, "We know that you want a young, exciting wrestler like a Shane Douglas or a Ricky Steamboat as a tag team, but we're going to give you an Erik Watts instead. And by golly, you're going to like him. And we're going to push him until you like him, and that's all there is to it." As a result, it used to be that you'd have to walk across the room to change the TV, today we've got remote controls. And people go, "Well, f—k that, I can't stand Erik Watts. He's a piece of s—t." Boom, and they hit the change button. So that is going to be the downfall. I don't think that's indicative of America today, I think that's indicative of WCW. It's countered what we're seeing in America. I mean, American car companies, American steel industries, and all these other companies have busted their ass to become competitors. And they're excelling because of it. As a corporate America goes, WCW is being left in the dust because they're not listening to the pulse of America.

Clark: From following wrestling as a kid growing up yourself, how would you say the sport or the business has changed? And are you saddened by what's happened to it?

Douglas: Oh yes, very much so. In fact, we were watching some tapes last night, and Carla, my wife, said, "It's different. What's different about it?" It's different, but

she couldn't place what it was. And I said, "Very few wrestlers today know what psychology. Very few wrestlers know what it means, like Rick and I would do, go out and tell a story. People have stayed tuned in to the soap operas for 30 years at a time because they keep them interested. The only reason they keep them interested—it's the same characters—they keep them interested with the storylines. WCW will not tell a storyline. They say, "Okay, this guy's a tough wrestler and this guy's a tough wrestler, and they're going to wrestle each other next week on a pay-per-view, so buy it." Well, there's story told. Why are these two guys fighting? What's the reason they're fighting? Who stole whose wife? Who tried to put who out of wrestling? I mean, there's no reason for any of these matches. The last pay-per-view, Slamboree, why in the world was British Bulldog fighting for the world championship? There was no reason at all for it. And the fans realized that.

Clark: And the Slamboree got around a 0.35 buy rate, the lowest ever for a pro wrestling pay-per-view from the WWF or WCW.

Douglas: Is that what it was? Good. I predicted that it would be, and I'm glad to hear that my prediction came true.

Clark: The thing that really fascinates me is, doesn't WCW try and work with the wrestlers hand-in-hand to teach them psychology or work with them?

Douglas: No. In fact, it's gone the other way. Let's jump back 20 years when Ric Flair was breaking into the business. The Lou Thesz, the Dory Funk Jr.s, the Verne Gagne's, and that group of people were teaching him psychology from the very start. This generation of wrestlers has gotten so damn greedy that they're afraid to teach the psychology to the younger wrestlers. They're using that as their weapon to keep themselves in positions in strength because they can go to the company and say, "Listen, I've proven myself for 20 years. I can go out and wrestle the match. These guys can't. They can go out and do moves but they can't wrestle with the psychology." Like Scorpio for instance. Scorpio hasn't the slightest idea of what psychology in a match is. He can do some of the most incredible moves I've ever seen, but he doesn't know how to put them together. A has to lead to B has to lead to C has to lead to D. You can't jungle it up any other way or you confuse the people. In that way, people like Ric Flair and those guys aren't doing what was done to them. They're not handing down the legacy that they were handed down. And so 20 years from now, if wrestling still survived—I'm predicting that wrestling won't be here 20 years now the way it is now, unless they make drastic changes—but if it is does go downhill and almost completely disappear, that will be the legacy that Ric Flair, Ole Anderson, Dusty Rhodes, and that whole group of people will have to live with. That they killed a sport that was great to them, great to the generation of people before them, and they screwed up for their generation after them.

Clark: It just really surprises me that they have great talent that could become excellent talent with the psychology. But WCW has no one there to help them with that?

Douglas: No. That should be Ric Flair's role. That's what Ricky Steamboat's role was to me. He taught me that. I thank him now. He was at my wedding last week, and I thanked him. We'll be life-long friends because of that. Our friendship has gone beyond wrestling. But that's what the Ric Flair's and the Arn Anderson's and the Bobby Eaton's and that whole group of people who've made their big bulk of money, and now are on the down-side of their careers, should be stretching their careers out. Not by trying to stay on top but by trying to help the next generation of wrestlers so they can look back—10 years from now if the business is booming, they can say, "The reason it's booming is because I taught Scorpio how to wrestle, I taught this person and that person, and Bagwell, and Douglas, and all these people." But I don't see it happening. And so, I think the business will die before it will prosper.

Clark: Do you think that with all the young talent starting out on the independent circuits today—I'm sure they can go into wrestling gyms and train—but do you think the wrestling business is going to take a tremendous step backwards because all these guys really won't have been taught psychology?

Douglas: Sure. Domenic Denucci taught me every move there was to know, taught me every reversal there was to know, taught me how to walk to the ring and walk back from the ring, taught me how to look good in the ring. But he didn't teach me all the psychology. You can't learn that except in the ring. That's a big problem today because there's supposedly really only two places to go in wrestling anymore. So that's a big problem. You can begin to see it now perpetuating itself. We have a vicious cycle going on where, like the Tatanka's for instance, he's being pushed and he doesn't know psychology. So what's going to happen is, the people that get pushed behind him and go against him will have to be in the same mode because there's nobody teaching him psychology, so he can't teach anybody after him psychology, because he doesn't know it. So the wrestling sport is going to be really hurting for a long time because it's going to be a lost art form. To learn psychology, somebody—like a Ricky Steamboat did with me—has to be able to get in the ring with you every night and show you how to do it and tell you what you're doing right and

wrong. Well, Bruno can't get in the ring now and show somebody. He's beyond that point. The Ric Flair generation is the generation that needs to do it, and they're moving to the point really quickly, within the next two or three or four years, that they'll be beyond the point that they can get in the ring. So then who does it? Who teaches it to you? There's nobody else there to do it.

Clark: Do you think that most of the employees working for WCW, because of the lack of leadership and all the disorganization, do you think most of the employees just really don't care anymore?

Douglas: Oh yeah. There is a feeling in that office and that dressing room—and not just for the wrestlers, I mean, from the wrestlers down to the secretaries and everybody in between—"It's somebody else's worry. Don't worry about it." And that's sad. Like you had mentioned that I looked really excited to be there, I was because I saw a group of talent there, and I thought, "Man, this is the chance to make this place go. We had a great group of talent here."

Clark: They probably have talent on par with what Titan Sports has.

Douglas: I think so too, having worked there. I'd say that from having worked in both places. I speak from experience. But the problem is, Vince can package a piece of talent. He can make a piece of talent that's not great and make people that they're great. Let's face it, Hulk Hogan was not a great wrestler. Hulk Hogan became the biggest phenomenon the sport ever knew because Vince knew how to package him. WCW, if we could draw it back to 1984, and you give WCW Hulk Hogan, as many times as his career was peaking, they wouldn't know how to package him. He would not be the superstar that he is today or was in the 80s and early 90s because they wouldn't know what to do with him. They would push him so far and then they'd beat him for somebody that wasn't even under contract. As a result, making that mistake over and over and over again has weakened the company and made it so fragile that WCW really is like a puzzle waiting to fall apart into pieces, literally. Dusty Rhodes will tell how many times he's a genius. Well to me a genius wouldn't have the company teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. The company has lost, on paper, \$12 million a year, 5 years running now. A genius would have the company turned around. Lee Iacocca was a genius because he took a company from the brink of bankruptcy and made it a multi-billion dollar business. That's genius. Dusty Rhodes is not a genius. He took a company that could have been a multi-million dollar business and has taken it to the brink of bankruptcy. The Ole Anderson's and all the rest of them, they'll all point the fingers to people like me and say, "It's your fault." The only thing I can say is, I'm not the man making the decisions. I don't decide who wins and loses. I don't decide who gets pushed. I don't decide who's going to go over. I don't decide who's going to have the belts. The ultimate blame does not involve a Shane Douglas or Ricky Steamboat or Tom Zenk or Brad Armstrong or any of us, it lies with people in the office. So when it goes down, that will be their legacy. They'll have to live with themselves for it. That was the one thing I told Ole when I left. I said, "Ole, I can look myself in the mirror and be proud of my accomplishments in this sport because I did it on my own. I didn't do it with kissing somebody's ass, like yours. I didn't do it because my dad was the booker. I didn't do it because I was a homosexual and sucked somebody's d-k. I didn't do it because I bought somebody drugs in the office or got somebody laid in the office. I did it because I was a good wrestler. So I can look myself in the mirror and tell my kids and grandkids, if I ever have them, I did it this way. This guy and this guy and this guy can't say that. This guy did it because he was a homosexual. This guy did it because he bought drugs for somebody in the office. This guy did it because he was screwing somebody in the office. This guy did it because his daddy was the booker. All those people have to ultimately look in the mirror some point down the road and say, "I had a good career, but why did I have a good career?"

Clark: Because of all the things you just mentioned, do you really think that the wrestling business has good values or practices good values?

Douglas: No, and I don't say it begrudgingly and I don't say it in judgement. I say that wrestling is the biggest bunch of misfits, the biggest bunch of thieves, the biggest bunch of two-faced backstabbing people you'll ever meet. And that's not to say that I haven't met some of the best friends I'll ever have in this world from wrestling. But there are very few people like Ricky Steamboat, like Johnny Ace, like Cactus Jack, that I can look to and say I can trust them sleeping in the bedroom right next to my wife with me gone. There are very few of them where I can say, "Here's the keys to my house, make yourself comfortable." There are very few that I trust to say, "Okay, listen, here's a secret I want you to keep between me and you." Because the nature of the business is backstabbing, it's always been that way. "You tell me something that nobody else wants to know, I'll stooge you off, so that will get me in good with the booker." Value wise, the wrestling business is probably the manual of "How Not To..." Definitely.

Clark: Do you think the product on television or the basic wrestling product practices good values or teaches the public good values?

Douglas: No. I don't think so at all. When you see a person get beat up on TV, but I don't think that's necessarily wrestling's place to do either. I mean, boxing doesn't

teach good values. Very few things on TV do today. I think what we ought to concentrate on is not so much the message that we put out, but being very careful not to put out a negative message, so to speak. Ours is a violent sport and it's violent by nature of what it is. I don't think that we have to be going out there and saying, "Okay, listen, this guy's a good guy because he's a school teacher. So you like him. Or this guy's a bad guy because he's from Iraq. So you have to hate him." I think we have so much of that in the world today, and that's the reason we have riots in Los Angeles and places like Atlanta. Because of that kind of stuff in professional wrestling—"Oh, he's a black man. He must be bad. Or he's from Iraq or he's from overseas, he's a foreigner. So he must be a bad guy." We're seeing it now. They're turning Steve Regal heel. Why is it a foreigner has to be a bad guy? As far as values go, wrestling has been the worst, and not just now, the history of wrestling has been that values are not the type of thing they're pushing. But I don't know so much that it should be either. I don't think everybody looks at football and says, "Football really instills bad family values because they're hitting each other and blowing each other's knees out." I don't think that wrestling needs to be that kind of thing, but by the same token, wrestling puts itself out there to try to do that. They sit themselves out there like, "It's okay for your kids to watch our show because we don't show blood and violence." Well, that's irrelevant as far as wrestling goes.

Clark: You returned last year under the Bill Watts reign of WCW and now you've departed under the Bill Shaw, Ole Anderson, and Dusty Rhodes reign of WCW. Do you think the organization has taken a step backwards since Bill Watts left?

Douglas: Without question. And again, I'm not blowing the trumpet for Bill Watts. I'm simply stating that he was the kind of guy that would go out there, he would make a decision, and live with it. As much as people hated him and disliked him, and there were times that I disliked him, I have respect for the man because he wasn't afraid to go out there and say, "Okay, this is a tough decision that needs to be made, and by gosh, I'm going to make it. Dusty Rhodes, you won't see him near a controversial decision if you tried to tow the fat f-k there. You couldn't do it. Ole Anderson, the same thing, 10 miles away from any place there's heat. Mike Graham, no place to be found. Barry Windham, no place to be found. Bill Shaw, Bob Dhué don't know any difference. If you were thinking about getting in a car and driving some place with these guys, and say, "Okay, who's got the directions?" None of them do. None of them want to say, "This is the way to go because if it's not the right way, I might get in trouble and lose my job, so I'll just keep my mouth shut when it comes to controversial decisions." Ole and Dusty sat back and kept quiet and wouldn't open their mouths, and they knew Bill was the kind of guy that would go out there and say what he was feeling and what he was thinking. So that's the easy guy to knock down. The guy that doesn't have true power is going to go out there and say what's on his mind. That was part of my downfall, the fact that I wasn't afraid to say what was on my mind. I think wrestling needed more people like that. The wrestling business is littered with two-faced people because of that very reason. You can say a lot of things about Bill Watts, he's not two-faced. If he doesn't like you, by gosh, he'll walk up to you and tell you he doesn't like you. I don't think that's a weakness, I think that's a strength. And I think that wrestling could use more of it.

Clark: From working for the company for the past year, where do you see WCW going in the future? A year from now and then five years from now.

Douglas: I'll make a prediction. Declining houses, continuing to decline. Ricky Steamboat and I, the last time that we wrestled on top in Baltimore drew an \$80,000 house. That was the best that Baltimore had been in quite a while. In fact, it was the best it had been, without a pay-per-view, in probably the last four or five years. Any time they carried a pay-per-view there, naturally it would draw a big crowd. Whenever you look at that and see where the houses are going now, the prediction would be that they're moving in the downward direction. They're going to continue to move in the downward direction because they have people like Dick Slater and JYD on top instead of younger wrestlers with talent. If I were a wrestler in WCW and had the opportunity to go to the WWF, I would go to the WWF as soon as the opportunity arose because it's a sinking ship. The funny thing about it is, the people that are screwing it are the people that are in the most volatile and most vulnerable job of all. Dusty Rhodes, his head is on the chopping block constantly. And so for him to think that he's got this strong position that he can do whatever he wants, he's making a big mistake because he's putting himself out now to be the Bill Watts, to get chopped like Bill Watts did. If I could get out of there (WCW), I'd get out of there as soon as I could.

Clark: Are there a lot of wrestlers in there now that are looking towards other things?

Douglas: Oh yeah. I don't want to say any names and get anybody else in trouble with the organization. But, I know several of the top, if not top pieces, certainly several of the best of pieces of talent that WCW has are looking to leave. WCW, to carry on with my prediction, I'll say that they're going to continue decreasing houses, declining houses, and you're going to see an outflow of talent that they need and an inflow of talent that they don't need. They don't need anymore Arn Anderson's and Ric Flair's, they need more Brian Pillman's and Steve Austin's, and they don't have that coming. That's going to be the prediction for the next year. Five years from now,

WCW will be gone. Ted Turner won't own it anymore, and he'll either sell it or it will go bankrupt.

Clark: It seems there is a different style of wrestlers being pushed now in WCW like Davey Boy Smith, Sid Vicious, Sting, and Big Van Vader. Do you think this is because they're going back to the old concept that bigger is better?

Douglas: I have no idea. I think they're doing it with the "throw the dart" approach. Who's available? See if we can get him, pay him whatever they want. If they come in and work out, fine. If they don't, fine. I don't think there's any long-term planning going on. I think they're just doing it haphazardly.

Clark: When Bill Watts came in he started the developmental towns to help bring up new talent and give them experience. Where else are new wrestlers able to wrestle and learn their trade?

Douglas: There is no place. As a result, five years from now the wrestling business is going to be bankrupt on talent. There's no young talent to come in. There's none of us that get in the ring for WCW, there's nobody that gets in the ring for WWF that did that from the first day they were in the sport. That's with years of learning. And there's no place to learn it now. So unfortunately, it's going to come down to not knowing. And five or ten years from now, there's going to be wrestlers that don't know how to do it. For true aficionados of the sport, for people who grew up watching it and really loving it, it's sort of sad to think that the future of the sport has been put in the hands of people like Dusty Rhodes.

Clark: Looking at the state the wrestling business is in, to young athletes who are looking to get into wrestling, would you suggest they get into wrestling?

Douglas: No. In fact, I had a guy yesterday ask me for the phone number of Domenic's gym because he knew a person that wanted to get in. I said, "Tell him to do anything else but wrestling." If I had a kid, there's no way that I'd allow my kid to get into wrestling today, not to have their future and their fate dealt with by Dusty Rhodes or Ole Anderson or people like that. The world's a tough enough place as it is, but to have to work with idiots like that, it makes it just too much tougher. I'll certainly tell people, if you have the opportunity to go into other sports or go and get an education or go into wrestling, I would say do anything else but the wrestling.

Clark: After working with Brian Pillman and Steve Austin in WCW, what are your personal opinions of them both as wrestlers and as people to work with and associate with?

Douglas: As wrestlers I think they've got great potential, great potential to get as good as WCW will allow them to get. Really, the shy's the limit for how good they'll both get. They'll only be held down by what WCW allows them to do and not allows them to do. As far as personalities, they're both good guys. Both of them have worked hard to get to where they are today. And I've got a lot of respect for them both as wrestlers and as people, and I'm glad that I had a chance to work with them.

Clark: Do you think those kinds of talented workers, not necessarily just big guys, will be the future of the wrestling business when they are really pushed?

Douglas: Oh, yes. I think that the 300 pound wrestlers that don't know what they're doing in the ring, the two big immovable objects meeting each other, I think that those days are gone. People have seen enough of that, and today they want to see the high-flying action-packed matches that have a story being told in them. And there's very few people that can do that today.

Clark: Since you are a smaller-sized wrestler, was there ever a time in your career where there was the thought in your mind that bigger is better and that you had to be a bigger person to make it in wrestling?

Douglas: Oh, sure. Whenever I went to the WWF I'd gorge myself with as much food as I could get and busted my ass as hard as I could bust it in the gym and took every amino acid known to man, trying to gain size and got to 249, and I really wasn't comfortable with that weight. I couldn't do any of the things that Shane Douglas could do so I subsequently dropped my weight back down because I wasn't comfortable at 249. But sure, it was a big complex for me to be in the ring with 300 pound guys or 280 pound guys and there I was at 230, 225. I was like the midget on the block. Hopefully, if I've left no other legacy to this sport, if I leave it permanently, which I think I will, if I've left no other legacy than the fact that small guys can go in and do it and do more exciting matches than the bigger guys can do, and I opened the door and laid the foundation for other wrestlers my size and my style to go in and wrestle, then I'll be happy with that.

Clark: Do you think that the bigger is better thought or that whole image is the main reason a lot of the wrestlers have gone into taking steroids?

Douglas: Sure. They saw the money that Hulk Hogan made and people that wrestled Hulk Hogan made, and that's definitely the reason why steroids have gotten

so big. And as a result, it's ruined a lot of lives. I mean, look at Kerry Von Erich, look at the people that have been arrested from it, look at the Grand Juries that have been investigating it. There's been a lot of lives ruined and shaken up over the steroid thing and the drug thing in wrestling.

Clark: From your experience at WCW, what kind of steroid use is there now? Without mentioning any names, is that still around?

Douglas: Yes. It's still widespread. And WCW pays lip service to drug testing, yet there's no real drug testing that goes on. There was one test the whole time that I was there and I knew that there were people that were on steroids that told me they were on steroids that passed the test. So it's lip service being paid to it. They're trying to keep the big bear off their back that's on Vince's back. And it's just a matter of time before they come.

Clark: Do you think that the steroid use in wrestling over the past ten years—we were talking about portraying bad values earlier—was a terrible thing to display to children and other young athletes?

Douglas: Sure. You've got Hulk Hogan that's sitting there telling the kids to say their prayers, take their vitamins, and do this and do that, but he doesn't tell them that he took steroids to get that big, and that's how he became Hulk Hogan. I think it's really the wrong story to be told. If you're going to tell a kid, as a role model, and I say this speaking from the fact that I think at one point I was possibly in the position of being a role model, the fact that I've also been in the classroom, and I know what the kids look up to. The kids look up to anybody that's going to talk to them on whatever level. If Madonna comes out and says it okay to stick your finger in yourself, then every girl in the country thinks it's okay to stick your finger in yourself. If it's okay for Michael Jackson to grab himself on TV, then every guy in the country thinks it's okay to grab himself. If it's okay for Hulk Hogan to take steroids to get big and make money in wrestling—it doesn't matter, kids don't want to hear that they could drop dead with using steroids, they don't want to hear that their heart could enlarge and be damaged by steroids, they don't want to hear that it can cause jaundice and other kidney and liver failure problems, or cancer. Because kids, they think they're invulnerable. "There's nothing going to hurt a kid at 16 years old." So to tell a kid those kinds of things is irrelevant, especially if it's a kid growing up who's in poverty or in a bad part of town. If you say, "You can take steroids and become 300 pounds, and by gosh, you'll be a millionaire if you can wrestle like Hulk Hogan," how are you going to tell that kid that that's not right? You can't tell that kid that it's not right. The sad part about it is, they think because of the controversy with it, they think that all wrestlers have used steroids. I've had umpteen kids come up to me and say, "Come on, Mr. Martin, I know you've had to take steroids." And, well, I haven't taken a steroid. That's part of the reason that I'm not 280 and making a million dollars a year. It's been a real bad down-side for me personally in the wrestling business, and I think it's been real bad for wrestling in general. And it's been very bad for the kids watching it.

Clark: So, you've never even tried steroids before?

Douglas: No. I thought about it because the lure was there, because of the sport, the way it is. But, I've never used them and I'm glad to look back now and say that I didn't. God only knows what kind of problems these guys are going to start having 15, 20 years down the road. And not just from wrestling, I'm talking from football, baseball, hockey, and all the major sports.

Clark: Why exactly did you leave WCW?

Douglas: I left WCW on an injury. I had a rotator cuff tear and a separated shoulder. At the time I had been renegotiating my contract, and I gave them an ultimatum date. I said if by June 8 I don't have a new contract on the table, June 9 I'm done. The decision to leave WCW, contrary to anything that they're saying or will say, I'm sure, is that Shane Douglas made the decision to leave WCW. They wanted to keep me there and they wanted to keep negotiating the contract point. And I simply told them that I wasn't going to negotiate past June 8.

Clark: Now that you just got married last week, have your goals and the priorities in your life changed?

Douglas: Oh, certainly. In fact, I was telling Carla yesterday, it's different this time. Every time I've left the road before, even though I didn't miss the road, I missed the competition of wrestling. I'll be 30 this November. I don't know if it's that the fire is gone or what, I don't have the desire right now to step into the ring and compete against somebody. And I don't know if it's because I've gotten married or if it's because I've had a sour taste in my mouth for the wrestling sport. I don't know what it is, or if it's just a combination of all of those things. But right now, I don't have any desire to put the boots on. I've got my boots sitting right in my closet right now. I've got no desire to put them on and wrestle in the ring right now. And I'm not saying that it will be that way 5 years from now or 5 months from now or even 5 weeks from now, I may want to get back to wrestling. But, as it stands today, in the beginning of June, I've got no desire at all to climb back in the ring. And especially,

I've got no stomach at all to put up with the kind of s---t that Ole Anderson and Dusty Rhodes want to dish out.

Clark: Are you looking into having a family at all?

Douglas: Oh sure, down the road. Carla, my wife, is considerably younger. She's 5 years younger than me, so there's no rush for us to have kids. And both of us want to wait a while before we do it. We want to enjoy ourselves and enjoy our relationship first and then go on and have a family later.

Clark: Before you returned to WCW last July, were you thinking that you were going to be in the wrestling business for 5 or 10 more years, or something long-term?

Douglas: Well, I didn't know. It was sort of a hit or miss thing for me. I went in, and like you had mentioned, I was really enjoying myself with it and I was really loving wrestling at that time. It was the first time that I had made money. It was the first time that I really felt that my abilities were being taken advantage of and that I was being used the way that I thought I should have been used before. But as soon as Bill Watts left, that changed. So my priorities changed. Whenever I saw that I wasn't going to get the push that I thought I was deserving of because my daddy wasn't the booker, so to speak, at that point, it changed quickly. Suddenly, all the bad feelings that I had about wrestling from before came flooding back. And from that point I sort of lost the desire to compete. I just don't have the stomach to deal with people like Mike Graham, Barry Windham, Ole Anderson, and Dusty Rhodes. To talk to these people, I'd rather sit down and talk to a pile of rocks than I would to them, because it's about the same thing. They think they're so smart and they try to double-talk with you. Some of the wrestlers may fall for it and don't know what they're doing. I take it like a slap in the face, like, "I'm going to try to talk above your head, and you won't understand me." Well, don't hand me that s---t. Talk to me face to face, give me whatever you want to tell me, as bad or as good as it is, and I'll follow you on it. Don't sit there and think that you're talking above my head and that I don't know what you're saying, and be condescending to me. That to me is the one thing that I've really never had the stomach for. And in wrestling there's an abundance of it.

Clark: Since you didn't really seem to have these problems with the WWF, if there were offers made by them, would you think about going back to work there? Or is it that you just want to put your wrestling career on hold for now?

Douglas: It would be a possibility. Like I said earlier, if I get the teaching job, I'm back to teaching full-time. I would have no reservations about going back to work for WWF. There's none of the personal feelings of hate, distrust, or hatred for the group of people running it up there like I had for WCW. But at this point, I can't speak for 5 weeks down the road from now. But right now as it stands, I've got no taste to want to climb back in the ring. They would have to make it worth my while and make it interesting for me to come back. More so than just the spot I had before, the middle of the card type of spot, that's not interesting to me. To me, to go back up there and be the middle of the card kind of guy, I'd rather teach school. It would have to be awful enticing for me to want to go back to wrestling at this point.

Clark: Since you follow politics, what are your opinions about the direction our country is going in under the presidency of Bill Clinton?

Douglas: I think America is getting exactly what it paid for or what it asked for. It asked for a President with no experience. It voted for a person who was running for President with no experience. And we're getting a taste of that now. We have no foreign policy to speak of. We have no direction at all on economics. He's telling us he's going to cut the deficit, but he does it by saying he's cutting \$50 billion out of a budget and adding \$250 billion more in spending. To me, \$50 billion minus \$50 billion plus \$250 billion equals the \$200 billion gained. So the basic mathematics is flawed from the very start. We have a President who's more concerned with pleasing homosexual groups and every little special interest group that he can please, instead of going out and doing what's right. To draw a comparison, Ronald Reagan, who's really a hero of mine as far as politics go, he may not have been the strongest President ever, but he was a man who was strong on his convictions and he stuck to them through all eight years of his presidency, never wavered. Bill Clinton has wavered week in and week out already on just about every issue he campaigned on. I think we're getting exactly what we paid for, and it wasn't much. We have four years of it, but we're stuck with it right now.

Clark: (laughs) How do you think this compares to WCW and their direction?

Douglas: (laughs) Very similar. It's very similar from a direction of having inept people run it. You can see what happens when you get inexperienced, inept people doing a certain job. It just leads to failure.

Clark: Who were some of the wrestlers you looked up to growing?

Douglas: Bruno Sammartino, Domenic Denucci, I was big fans of them. I was a big

fan of Andre the Giant growing up. Pat Patterson, when he was wrestling. There were a ton of wrestlers that right now I can't even think of off the top of my head, that I had a world of admiration for. After getting into the wrestling business, I remember sitting in the dressing room looking around the dressing room, thinking to myself, "There aren't those type of people here anymore. The business doesn't have those types of wrestlers anymore." And I think that's part of the big problem. They were wrestlers that had learned their craft from start to finish. And today we're inundated with a bunch of wrestlers who have learned the craft halfway and don't know the other half. And there's nobody teaching them the other half.

Clark: Who else have you run across in the business who've learned from or people who taught you or helped you, and people you might have become friends with in the wrestling business?

Douglas: I learned a lot from Bobby Eaton. I learned a lot from Arn Anderson, having worked with him. I've learned a lot from a lot of wrestlers that don't know it, from watching them. I would sit down and watch the monitor. It wasn't a form of entertainment for me, it was a form of learning for me. Whereas some of the people would be talking in the dressing room about the rat that they were going to lay tonight or the drugs they were going to do or the drink they were going to drink. I was watching the monitor and watching the wrestlers and watching their moves and their psychology and their positioning and all of that, instead of worrying about all the other partying and girl chasing. So that was never my deal on the road. I guess I was sort of more clear-headed to the whole thing than some of the other wrestlers were. Without a doubt, Ricky Steamboat was the main person in my career. Ricky and Domenic both, and Bruno, having watched tapes of Bruno.

Clark: From spending so much time with Ricky Steamboat and the close relationship you have with him, would you say that he's the kind of person that's far and few between in this business as far as having good values?

Douglas: He's one of a kind. He's one of a kind in this sport. Bruno, I would say, would be the closest other person, and Domenic, of course, that I could trust and was really caring. But, as far as people that I've worked with on a day in and day out basis, Steamboat is the only person that I could give \$500,000 and say, "Here, hold this for me for five years," and come back, and there would be all the money there plus interest. He's a true gentleman. He's a true friend. And I'll love him forever for what he taught me and for having been so faithful and honest and up front with me. That's something that you don't come by in this business very often. It is sad, but it also makes a relationship like mine and Rick's all that much more positive because it does come so seldom that when it does come, you can really cherish it and treasure it for a long time.

INTERVIEW EARTHQUAKE

The following interview with Earthquake (John Tenta) that was published in issue #23 was conducted via telephone from his home near Vancouver, British Columbia on February 22, 1993.

Clark: What made you decide to quit your sumo wrestling career and go into professional wrestling? And what influenced your decision?

Tenta: I was doing good in sumo wrestling. At the time, I was undefeated and I was famous and doing well. But, I didn't have the freedom I wanted. There were too many rules that I had to live by. At times, too, I was being treated like a kid- I had all these rules I had to go by. And I just wasn't into it. As for the influence, it was just a decision I made by myself.

Clark: How did you make the connections to get into pro wrestling?

Tenta: At the time, I had a Japanese girlfriend over there and I had her contact the different offices for me. Then, I had a couple secret meetings- one with Inoki and one with Giant Baba- and I just had to decide from there who I wanted to go with. And I chose Baba. I had a good time over there. I had lots of good trainers. Great Kabuki was one of my main trainers. He was my tag partner for my first couple years. I felt I learned a lot from him.

Clark: How did you then get involved with Titan Sports?

Tenta: Well after awhile, there were a few personal matters that made me decide things just weren't going so well. I didn't feel I was making enough money over there. I mean, I was just making it from month to month. So, I sent some pictures and my video to Titan Sports and they liked what they saw so they gave me a tryout.

Clark: Was it tough adjusting to the lifestyle of professional wrestling- being on the road all the time- or was it similar to sumo wrestling?

Tenta: With sumo wrestling, you don't go and travel all over. Traveling all over in Japan for pro wrestling, it was really easy for me over there. The only responsibility

I had was checking out of the hotel on time and getting on the bus. They drove or flew you everywhere. If you were a partier, all you did was get on the bus and crash. It was really easy compared to the WWF where you're flying to a different city everyday and driving everyday- it's a little rougher.

Clark: Did you have a tough time at first with the WWF's schedule?

Tenta: No, I was enjoying it at first because I was going to all these big towns, being in all these big buildings that I had watched pro teams play in. It was kind of exciting for me. But of course, after a few months of it, it started to become a job!

Clark: When you were starting out with the WWF (Fall of 1989) and were "learning the ropes" of the business and the travel, who were some of the people who helped you out and gave you advice and taught you things?

Tenta: I got hooked up with Dino Bravo right away and we traveled together a lot, so he was the one that I talked to most of the time and asked him questions. There wasn't a whole lot to ask. I just asked different opinions. For example- what he thought of my work and what he thought of other people's work. Jimmy Hart was also a big influence. He sometimes can be quite blunt. I listened to him a lot. I think he's got a lot of wrestling sense, even though he's not really a wrestler. He's got a great head on his shoulders and he influenced me a lot. Dino and Jimmy during the first year were the guys I was traveling with.

Clark: Did the traveling have any effects on your health?

Tenta: No. I'm diabetic. And when I joined up with the WWF, I had just learned I was diabetic. And actually, it helped me. All the matches, all the exercise helped me.

Clark: What kind of exercise were you doing when you were there?

Tenta: I wasn't doing any while I was there. I got run-down pretty quick with the traveling. But now, I've started a program again where I'm weight training and trying to start running again. I didn't see how the guys were doing it, with all the traveling. They were going to the gym everyday. And I just thought, "I can't do that, I've got to go to sleep!"

Clark: What kind of a schedule were you working with Titan?

Tenta: It was eleven days on, three days off, five days on, three days off, then eleven days on again. I was on the road about twenty six days a month. There were sometimes when I'd have to leave the night before because I live in Vancouver. And Christmas nights, I'd have to leave Christmas nights, instead of leaving on Boxing Day (12/26).

Clark: What were your main reasons for wanting to take some time off?

Tenta: Well, I didn't know where I could go from here. I had my run with Hulk, then I had a run with Jake Roberts, then I teamed up with Typhoon and went against LOD, then we were the champions for awhile. I just didn't see what else I could do right now and I didn't want to stick around and just become "another match on the card." I want to try to keep myself on the top half of the card. I just didn't see where I would fit in right then. So, I just decided that I would take a bit of time off. With this training I'm doing, I'm trying to drop a bit of weight. Hopefully, I'll be able to do it and then I'll be able to impress people when I come back and make a big impact.

Clark: Were you also run-down with taking all those big bumps in the ring? You certainly have a style for a larger person that's quite amazing.

Tenta: Well, thank you. No, it's just the way I was taught. I was taught in Japan, I took bumps for smaller people than I probably should have. It's just the way I've been brought up. I try to work hard and I try to put on the best match I can.

Clark: You talked about you wanting to lose some weight. Is that something that you're really focused on or conscientious about?

Tenta: This is just something that's going to help me both professionally and health wise. Just the little bit I've done already has helped my health tremendously. Like I said, I'm diabetic, and my blood-sugar has come down in just the short time that I've started training. Also now that I'm training, I used to be a heavy smoker, and I've given that up, too.

Clark: Do you think it's tough when you're on the road all the time to control bad habits or help stop them? Sometimes they get carried away?

Tenta: It can be tough. I never was one of those guys that ate especially healthy. I never went out of my way looking for turkey or egg whites, you know, and stuff like that. But in doing that, I also picked up bad habits where I'd eat a lot of junk food and fat food. But, if your disciplined enough, I don't think it's a problem. There's always ways to take care of yourself.

Clark: When you were on the road all that time, were you sick a lot with headaches and stuff and being run-down?

Tenta: I was always run-down. But again, that can probably be linked with being a diabetic in that my health was kind of out of control- my sugar level and stuff. I mean, when you're not feeling good, you just feel like shit all day. I did have a lot of headaches. But, I think it's all linked to my health. I don't think it had anything to do with being on the road too much.

Clark: Were there ever times when all these problems would effect your performance?

Tenta: No, I don't think I let it effect my performance too much. Usually when I'd get to the arenas, I'd start to get excited. I mean, after awhile, a lot of guys I don't think get excited anymore. But, I still get excited about my matches. I'm still excited to go in front of the people and have fun out there and entertain the people.

Clark: Were there other times before when you wanted to take time off?

Tenta: No. I mean, there were times when I just took time off for summer vacations and stuff like that. But, I was doing well. I had good runs. I was making good money. I really didn't have any reason to take time off. For the first time, I was making money. I was a newlywed when I got into WWF. And at the very beginning when I was still in Japan, like I said, I wasn't making any money. And now all of a sudden, I'm with WWF- hey, 'We can buy a car. We can buy a couch!' I mean, we were renting an apartment when we got married and it was empty. All we had was an old kitchen table in there that my parents loaned me. Then I joined WWF and boom, I'm buying everything new and I'm paying for it in cash. You know, it was great. It was just incredible how our lives changed. When I first got in WWF, I was kind of in awe. I had been wrestling five or six years in Japan, but the WWF was still big time. I was like, 'Gee, do I really fit in here or what?' I was a little bit unconfident. I got thrown into the Survivor Series when I had just started a month before. I got thrown in there because Barry Windham had taken off. I was concerned. I thought, 'Well, gee, my style in Japan is a little different from here.' I know I looked green in my first few months. But, these were the stars, I didn't want to hurt them, and I didn't want anyone to say, 'He's no good.' I don't think it was until I wrestled Hulk that I really got comfortable. I heard all the stories about- if you hurt Hulk, you won't get to wrestle with him. And boom, I got to put him out of wrestling for a while and then I had all these matches with him. So, that's when I really started to come out of it and really started to enjoy it.

Clark: As you said, you came in and you were tremendously over with the people working with Hulk and Jake. And then, you were put into a tag team situation with Typhoon. Do you think that your drawing power dropped when you went into the tag team situation?

Tenta: I thought with Typhoon, we could become a big draw. But, the tag situation in WWF seems to get screwed up every time you start to get a little steam in it. We were with LOD, which I thought would draw, but there were always problems where tag matches always turned into singles matches. I love Typhoon, he was a great partner, but- not being his fault- just the whole tag situation maybe wasn't so good for me like I thought it would be. I got to do a few single matches at the last TV that I did and I felt I got a pretty good reception. It made me think maybe I should have stayed single. I thought we would do good because I thought they were going to put some steam on us, being the biggest team ever in the world and stuff like that. But nothing just ever seemed to happen, that's all. It's a known fact that the tag teams won't be the main events. They'll put you semi-main events, but they never put the tag main events. I was ready to accept that. All I wanted to do was find a way to stay in the top half of the card. So, I made the suggestion, 'Hey, what are you going to do with Tugboat.' They said, 'Well, I don't know.' So I said, 'Well you know, I'd love to have him as my partner.' Pat Patterson was the guy that went, 'Really?' They acted like they had never even thought about it. Whether that's true or not, they put us together. I just thought it would have gone other places, that's all.

Clark: Do you think that there's a drought of tag teams in wrestling right now, especially in the WWF? What do you think are the reasons why there seems to be a problem developing new tag teams?

Tenta: Talking as a fan, I remember I always used to like tag teams. I mean, they can be just as exciting as the singles in that when the babyface finally gets that hot tag, boom, there's excitement. I don't know, for some reason the whole tag situation- I don't really look at WCW too much- but just knowing the WWF, there's just always a problem. As soon as there's one good team, something happens, like they break up.

Clark: Do you think that there's a total lack of talent in wrestling, though?

Tenta: You've got Yokozuna right now. I haven't been able to catch all the shows, but there's a guy... You know, I kind of compare him to myself when I come in. There's a big guy that can make a big impact, but he doesn't have anyone to wrestle

right now. He doesn't have Hulk Hogan right now. If Hulk Hogan was there, I think it would be nothing but big crowds. Is somebody brand new going to be able to draw people or do you need someone that people already know to come in and do something? I guess that's a question you'd have to ask promoters more than myself. I think Yokozuna is a great heel, but he just needs another single babyface to work with.

Clark: Do you think the Yokozuna character will be a long-term success or a short-term success?

Tenta: My personal opinion is that he would be more of a short-term in that he can't wrestle for very long. His matches have to be short or else it gets too blown up. I'm not putting him down for that because, like I said earlier, I think he's a great heel. But, they need a big, over babyface to be working with him. This one that they're working up to Wrestlemania with Bret Hart, people don't believe that Bret Hart will be able to beat him. Well, who's going to be able to beat him? Hulk Hogan, if he comes back, he might be able to beat him. But, who's there right now. It can't be Typhoon, who's the second biggest guy there now that I've gone. Typhoon can't beat him because he's lost to Doink! What other babys do they have there right now? Mr. Perfect. He's the same size as Bret Hart. They need a big babyface right now, that's what I think. I'd like to imagine that one day I can fill that spot. But, I don't have enough confidence in myself that I could ever be the main babyface. I think I could be number two, three, or four babyface, but never number one.

Clark: When you say that you think you lack the confidence to do that, what do you mean by that?

Tenta: I just don't know if I draw well or not. Or if I could draw well or not. I was doing great against Hulk, but you know, everyone does good against Hulk. I felt we were doing really good business. It seems like we were always getting over \$100,000 houses, and boom, our program got cut. There is no way that I can compare to Hulk Hogan, but I'd like to try be a Randy Savage or something. That's one of the reasons why I'm trying to train and trying to lose weight. Being 440 pounds, I don't feel that I'm going to have all the following that I would need to be successful. But I'm hoping if I come back at say 360, and I look a lot better, that people are going to say, 'Hey, look at Quake, he's been working his ass off for the last year.' And create some interest, that's what I'm hoping. But again, that's something that I have to do first before I think of it. I have to have the discipline and the desire. Right now I've got it. But you know, that can always change. I could get lazy one day. I'd like to try to be one of Vince's important wrestlers instead of just, you know, one of the guys.

Clark: Do you feel that your character just got lost in the shuffle there?

Tenta: I felt like I was better talent and deserved better shots than what I was getting. I've been told by a bunch of the other wrestlers that they feel that I'm the best big man in the business. And I don't know, maybe I started believing them or something, I don't know! I felt I could be used better. But I guess nobody else did. So, I said, 'Vince, I've got to go somewhere else. I've got to make some money.'

Clark: Earlier we were talking about Typhoon getting beat by Doink. Did you feel that you were going to be in that position as well?

Tenta: Yeah, I thought that I would be in a situation where I'm putting over the new heels that are coming in. I did a few matches against Yokozuna where I got beat. I just didn't want that to become a habit. I mean, I don't mind losing, but I don't want to get killed. I want to have a career. I didn't have any heat when I left- Vince is welcoming me back whenever I think the time is right or whenever he thinks the time is right. I think he took good care of me. He didn't kill me off. And I think I took care of him in that I did everything he wanted me to. I think I made him happy. He felt that I did a professional job and I felt the same about Vince.

Clark: When you look back at things now, did you like doing the heel role or the babyface role better? And why?

Tenta: I really enjoyed being the heel and I had a lot of heat. But, I also would have liked the chance to have been a singles baby to see how far I could have taken that. Like I said, I got good applause when I walked in for my matches against Yokozuna and Bam Bam. I felt I had a great response in the Royal Rumble when I squared off against Yokozuna. I'd kind of like to fool around with that for awhile and see where it goes because as a heel you can be on top for awhile, but you're going to go down sooner or later. Unless of course, you happen to be one of Vince's main guys.

Clark: Do you think for longevity of a character- for the long-term- that it's better to be a heel or babyface?

Tenta: For some reason, the WWF's territory has always been a babyface territory. I mean, how often have you seen the babyfaces do jobs? They might do countouts or DQs or something like that, but they keep their babyfaces well protected. Vince's philosophy, to a point, was- make the people happy. So most of the babyfaces were

going over at the house shows. And I think that has to do with some of the reason why the houses aren't so good. I don't know for sure, but I know when I was a kid and I was watching wrestling, if the heel went over, I was going to be back next time to see the babyface win. I don't think you have enough of that. I think a lot of the babyfaces have attitudes, too, about doing jobs. Once in awhile, I think it's good for them to do jobs. I know I said earlier that I didn't want to make a habit out of doing jobs but I did do some and I didn't have a problem with it.

Clark: Do you feel that you and Typhoon got over better as heels?

Tenta: I think we killed ourselves off with LOD in that we were supposed to be big and strong and they were supposed to be big and strong, but when we squared off, we made the guys look like midgets and we were still bumping our asses off for them. I think we got over better when we were babys against Money Incorporated. Working against Ted and Mike, it was great because they made us the way we should have been.

Clark: Since you first went into the organization in 1989, what kind of changes have you seen the WWF undergo? Has there been a decrease in the interest of the public?

Tenta: Yeah, I think there's been a huge decrease. I think the novelty wore off a couple years ago. I think once Hulk kind of took off, that took a lot out of WWF. Vince is great in that he doesn't waste time explaining why wrestlers leave, instead he gets you interested in who's coming. It's like- out of sight, out of mind. Hulk Hogan, the biggest draw in wrestling, he's just disappeared, he's gone. I don't know if people fully understand why or where he's gone. You know, out of sight, out of mind.

Clark: Do you think all the negative publicity and the scandals had much of an effect on the interest level or the decline in business?

Tenta: I don't know if that really has effected them or not because I don't think a lot of wrestling fans saw it. I think there's a lack of interest because Vince has tended to keep his main men on top for just a little too long. Hulk Hogan is an exception in that he can never be on top too long the way he has been drawing. I hate to mention names, but some of the guys that have switched from heel to baby and this and that, he still keeps them on top. He doesn't give anyone else a new chance to be on top, to be main event. I think that hurts. Maybe that's the old way. I'm just thinking when I was a kid there was always the top guy, but he would disappear for awhile and someone else would take his place.

Clark: How has the pay changed because of all this?

Tenta: The pay has gone down. As the territory goes down, the pay goes down, because we're paid on percentage of the house.

Clark: You weren't being paid a set salary, you weren't on a guarantee?

Tenta: No.

Clark: Do you think there's more of an incentive for the guys to work harder when their pay is based on how well the company does?

Tenta: I think there's a good 70-80% of the wrestlers in the WWF going out there every night working hard and giving it their best. There's a few lazy ones, but you hope that the ones that are working hard will carry that over so people won't notice it as much. I guess WCW is paying that way (on an incentive type system). I'm ready to work for money. All I want is a chance and an opportunity. That's why I'm going to try to make an opportunity for myself in the next year. I'm going to make some sacrifices so that I can do what's best for me and get the high position. I think with guaranteed money it's great for the wrestlers. But, if they're going to have ways that they can sit at home for months and still collect it, that's no good for the owner or the fans because then you're ripping off the fans as well. The wrestlers aren't thinking of the fans and the company, they're thinking of themselves. That's where I start to get pissed off because I like to give the fans what they're there for. When I was a kid, I was entertained. I just feel strongly about that. Of course, there's legitimate injuries, but there's also guys that milk shit. That's where I get angry. They're the ones that kill the system for themselves and then they complain about not having a guaranteed salary.

Clark: It seems that there's a lot of that in all sports...

Tenta: I think professional athletes- football, hockey, whatever- a lot of them play with injuries. And I don't they're as big as crybabies.

Clark: How has the motivation of the talent and the morale changed since you've been in there for three years?

Tenta: When I went in there, the territory was still doing great. Hulk was still there.

Warrior was main eventing the other town. Well actually, there were three towns. The A and B towns, they were always doing great houses and the morale was up. Then, things started to slow down a bit so he put it to two shows a night. And then, houses picked up and were doing good again. But then they starting going down. When I left WWF, there was a lot of unease with the other wrestlers. A lot of them were saying, "I wish I could do that- get out and go to Japan." Of course, not everyone can do that, I'm a lucky one there. I think the morale has gone down. But, the new guys that come in, sometimes are happy, sometimes they're not.

Clark: I've heard a lot of stories and people talking about you being one of the toughest street fighters in the business. You and Haku always seemed to be mentioned when that subject comes up. Would you say that's true?

Tenta: (Laughs) I'm not saying whether it's true- it's possible. I never considered myself a tough guy. When I was a teenager growing up, I had no confidence at all about fighting. I didn't know how to fight so I'd have a few smaller guys take advantage of that and make me look like an idiot. Then when I got into amateur wrestling, that's when I started to get a little bit more tough. I had success at it so it made me work all the more harder. Then, I went to university (college). By then, I had been on the Canadian national team for a number of years and then in 1983 I won a world championship. And once you win a world championship, you feel pretty good about yourself. I just kept taking it farther and farther. I still never was much of a fighter, but I've just learned how to take care of myself, is how I'd put it. As for Haku, I always say I'm not afraid of anyone in this business, but one guy I don't want to mess with is Haku.

Clark: You talked about when you were younger and that you didn't have much confidence with the ability to stand up to people. Do you think that after that when you got into the position- wrestling- did you take some of the anger and aggression out that you had built up inside?

Tenta: I think I probably did. All my life, I've always been big. I've always been overweight. I've always loved sports, though. But, I've always been teased. So, that made me work harder, that made me decide I wanted to be just as good as the other kids, even though I'm fat. And throughout the years, I kept that mentality, kept wanting to be as good as everyone else. Then, I started to get better than everyone else at things I was doing. That's why at 6'7", 440 lbs I can do the things I can do now because I tried hard to be able to do the things that other people that were smaller than me could. So that's where a lot of my talent has come from- wanting to be as good as everyone else. As for being one of the toughest guys in the business, I don't want guys to come challenging me or anything but I don't back down either. The people in the WWF that have gotten to know me for three years and when I get mad about something, they know to back off.

Clark: What happened with the match with Kitao in Japan?

Tenta: Well, he did a big job for me at Tokyo Dome and then he was supposed to do another one for me two days later. But, he got booed out of the Tokyo Dome so he felt he lost face so he didn't want to do the job, he wanted me to do the job. I got angry there because he wasn't listening to the booker, he wasn't listening to the boss. And I thought who the hell is this guy. How has he paid his dues that he can tell them what he wants. So, I started cutting promos in the dressing room. There was Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, Bret Hart, and Earl Hebner in the dressing rooms. I started cutting promos about how this guy needs to be stretched and this and that. I was running my mouth off. We got in there and things didn't go real good inside the ring. I was hot, he was hot, and it turned into a bit of a shoot there. I came out better because I knew the working part of wrestling as well. I was throwing some of that in. He gave me a heck of a kick to the knee and it hurt like hell, but for the people, I lifted up my knee and brushed it off like it was nothing. I was putting my finger in his face and cussing him out and this and that. Even though I wasn't doing a heck of a lot, I came out better because I looked like I was. Like he went for another kick, and I caught it. He went for some kind of an armbar thing where there's not much you can do once he gets you down, and his plan was to get me down and probably rip my arm off. But, I didn't go down and that's when he knew he was in trouble and he picked the wrong guy. Haku had to smack him around a bit in a match once, too. I guess he doesn't learn who to mess with and who not to.

Clark: Back when the bad publicity was coming out all the time about the WWF in the media early last year, what kind of feelings did you have about it and how did it effect you and your organization?

Tenta: I guess I was kind of naive to all that kind of stuff at first. I heard all the other wrestlers joking about this and that and this person and that person but at first, I didn't think they were serious. When all that came out, it was like an eye opener for me. I'd been leading this protected life over in Japan just hopping on the bus and everything, and that's that. There's no question that there would ever be that kind of publicity for my company in Japan. Now this has come up and I thought holy smokes. I thought it was going to be the end. I thought that all hell's going to break lose and this is going to be the end of the WWF. I was worried about it. There were other people that were concerned. But, the other wrestlers just said, "Hey, don't

worry, it will pass just like everything else."

Clark: Do you think Vince McMahon has cleaned up his organization from all those things that came out in the media?

Tenta: I think he has. Pat Patterson is back. And I guess he's one of the names that has been mentioned in different areas. But, I myself have never seen Pat act unprofessional. He's always been a gentleman and professional in my eyes and opinion. So, I see no problem whatsoever with Pat being back. The other people that have been mentioned- again, I can't say too much because I've never witnessed anything. I've heard things, I've seen a few things... I think the company is better now. I think it's a better place now. That's really all I care to say about that. They had bad publicity about steroids, about drugs, and this. Now, Vince has these tests that are supposed to be the best in the business. So, I feel he's taken care of steroids and drugs. Now, there was the thing about the homosexuals. Well, I think he took steps to clean that up. I think he's done all he can do for his company. I mean, if I thought Pat was unprofessional and he was doing wrong things, then Vince could do something to him, but I don't think he is unprofessional.

Clark: Do you think that Pat was treated unfairly when it came to all the allegations and everything that was all over the media?

Tenta: I think he was being trashed for something that... I don't feel he had any involvement in the cases that were being talked about- about the ring crew and stuff. There has been talent that has accused Pat of things, but I just couldn't see Pat doing that. I think he's too professional for that.

Clark: With you being on the road all that time, how did it effect your family life? Did you miss out on a lot of your family life?

Tenta: It did take a lot out of my family life. It put a lot of pressure on my wife, who is Philippino. I brought her here, we were just married. She wasn't used to our customs and she didn't know how to get around or anything and I had a lot of things that I had to take care of that she had to learn to take care of right away. She did a good job, but then I'm on the road, and I get grouchy and if something's not done right, I just rear at her. But of course, as time went on she knew what to do. I've kind of missed my daughter growing up. You know, she was just born before I started with WWF, she's 3 1/2 years old now. So, I missed all the stuff that parents are watching for- like her first step and everything. Now I'm going to have another child this next month so it's going to be nice to be around a little more for awhile. I live in a town house complex. I went to my first meeting a few weeks ago. So, I'm just finally being able to do stuff. For awhile, I just want to try and do my own thing- go to Japan and I want to get a few guys together and tour around British Columbia for awhile and live off the name that the WWF has made for me.

Clark: Are you thinking of promoting some shows out there?

Tenta: Yeah, I'm going to try! I don't know how good or bad it will be, but I'm going to give it a shot. If it does well, I'll keep it up for a little while. I want to get away from Vancouver because there has been some idiots that have been running here and the talent is just terrible. So I want to go into new territories that used to be good. The reason there's no TV for local wrestling here is because the talent was so bad. I want to get some decent talent like Buddy Rose, he's down in Portland. There's Col. Debeers that's around here, he's in Portland. There's a few guys I can get together and put together a decent little show. That's what I'm going to try to do. I'll be working for WAR and New Japan and so far it's just one week a month.

INTERVIEW MAX MOON

The following interview with Max Moon-Kato-Paul Diamond (Tom Boric) that was published in issue #25 was conducted via telephone from his home in Tampa, Florida on March 30, 1993.

Clark: How big of a difference was it for you jumping from the AWA to the WWF, with money, fame, and it being a national promotion?

Moon: It was definitely big with the money, for sure. Because, when the AWA was on its last legs and it was kind of being run like an independent type of deal, they were only running dates from show to show. So, I was barely surviving. Then all of a sudden, I was working full-time. And really, going to the WWF was the first time that I really made any decent money. Before that, I worked Tennessee, Texas, and all these little territories, and that's where I learned how to work. It was quite a big deal. As far as the stardom or anything like that, I never really got any of that just because I was never one of the featured attractions and then I also wrestled under a mask and stuff so I really wasn't recognized. So, I couldn't tell you about that.

Clark: Did you consider it the ultimate big break in your career?

Moon: Oh yeah, because that was always the thing. "Go to New York, go to New

York." But, once you get there and you're there for awhile, unless you get a real good break... It looks a whole lot better than it really is.

Clark: Did you have tremendous anticipation going in there?

Moon: Oh, absolutely. But, once I started and saw that I wasn't going to be a Hulk Hogan, or not even close, it was kind of disappointing because I've been an athlete all my life. I played professional soccer before I went into wrestling. To compete is in my blood, and for me to work hard and work my ass off and do the best that I could do, that was never good enough to advance me there. It's a weird sport. In any sport, you train harder and you get better, you become first-string or you get more money or whatever. And in this, it doesn't matter what you do. Maybe Japan, they appreciate the talent. But, not the WWF.

Clark: What other types of sports did you play and what's your background as far as what you did before you got into wrestling?

Moon: I played any and all sports. I'm a sports fanatic. I grew up in Canada so I played hockey. I played basketball in high school. Soccer was really my life. I was born overseas, in Coatia, where the war is now and it used to be a part of Yugoslavia. My father played soccer over there and I kind of followed in his foot steps, and that's all I ever wanted to, was play professional soccer. Which I did, in 1980 I was the sixth pick overall in the first round of the North American Soccer League draft. I was drafted by the Calgary Boomers and I played there a year and then I played three years in Tampa. And then the whole league folded. At that point, I didn't feel like going to get a regular job yet. Just being a good athlete and watching wrestling I thought I could do fairly well at it. I started working out at the Gold's Gym in Tampa and I met the Malenkos, I became friends with Boris Malenko's son Joe. He told me his dad was training guys at the time, and I trained.

Clark: When you went to Titan, compared to when you were wrestling in the AWA, regarding the public, was there an increase in the amount of recognition that you received?

Moon: No, not that much. Just because first of all, I went in there as Paul Diamond and I was just the first or second match. So, you're not given much TV time. Obviously, there were some fans who knew me from the AWA, but there wasn't that much. And then after that, the other ones were under a mask, so there was none really.

Clark: How did you feel about that? Were you kind of looking forward going in there to getting more recognition?

Moon: No, not really. Hey, if it became great, I'd sign autographs or whatever, that's fine. But, I just wanted to do the best that I could and be the best that I could be in the ring and be respected by the peers, by the other wrestlers, as far as my ability. Because, fans have different opinions, but unless you step in the ring... To be respected by the peers or the people that know how the business is, is what is most important, I feel. I think I pretty much accomplished that. But, that gets you more frustrated because all the guys say, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, you're good," this and that, but yet the promoters aren't giving you a push and you're not getting anywhere. That's frustrating more than anything.

Clark: When you look back on working for both organizations, were you happier as a person working for either AWA or WWF, or wasn't there much of a difference?

Moon: I wasn't unhappy working for the WWF, I just at times got frustrated because I thought that I could contribute more to the company and I was never really given a chance. So, I'd go through periods where I'd try and talk to them and come up with ideas and think about new stuff. It wasn't going anywhere. Finally, I think they realized a little bit what I could do, but the only thing that did was keep me employed. That's it. By being better and working harder it didn't put me up the ladder. When you look at what's going on in the business. I don't knock anybody, but the fans can see what's pretty much going on. We entertain the people, but they appreciate good performers as opposed to not good performers and they can tell the difference.

Clark: Since you're a smaller sized wrestler, you might say, did you think that you had to be bigger to go to the WWF?

Moon: Yeah, you know, that was always the thing. "Oh, they don't take you unless you're 250 lbs." Yeah, I kind of thought to be successful I'd have to be involved in a tag. And I didn't disillusion myself and think at 225 lbs., 230 lbs., I was going to be Hulk Hogan. That wasn't it. I think the way the Max Moon thing started out, and if we had gone with it, I would have been very pleased with that. I think I just wanted to be kind of in the middle of the card and be kind of like a special attraction for the kids, especially the way that character was for the kids, I think if they would have done anything at all with it, the kids would have looked at like a superhero type of thing. But it never got off the ground.

Clark: Would say that the attitude about having to be bigger to make it in the WWF or a big organization like that is a bad mentality to have?

Moon: Yeah, I think so. You know, I just don't understand. You look at their talent right now and they've got so many huge guys and I think the people just get sick of seeing two big guys just... not doing anything. There's some guys there that are good athletes but are limited by their gimmicks. And then there's other guys that are just huge, and that's all. Once you see a big guy, maybe you'll go out the first time because he's so huge and so muscular, but then if he can't wrestle, why would you go back to see him again? I think with some of the small guys, if they can train the people, they can keep coming back and giving them different stuff. With some of these big guys, it's always the same stuff.

Clark: Do you think one of the main reasons why there's been a steroid problem in wrestling is because of that mentality about being bigger?

Moon: Yeah. The Legion of Doom/Road Warriors, I love the guys to death and they're great, and this obviously wasn't their fault. They just basically came into wrestling and they got a big push. They got a hell of a fan following and all of a sudden, everybody that saw wrestling thought, "Wow, I've just got to be huge, and the wrestling part will take care of itself, just as long as I'm big." So, I think that's where it started. But I think we should just look at where it's gotten us now. It was great to see huge bodies for awhile, but now we're back to square one, let's see some wrestling again.

Clark: Did you ever use steroids to get bigger because of that mentality of you have to be big to make it?

Moon: Yeah, I'm not going to say that I haven't, because I have. I would probably say most of the guys have at one time or another. It was for that, but also for the type of schedule we have, being on the road 22-25 days a month, flying everyday. Also, to maintain looking halfway decent. I didn't have to, obviously it was a choice. But certainly, it made it easier on you and your joints and it made it easier to keep your weight up and look halfway presentable on television, which I think is important.

Clark: Were you using steroids at all in the AWA?

Moon: No, no.

Clark: Was it just in Titan that you used them?

Moon: Yeah. And right before, too, just because you want to go in there and you want to impress with the way you look.

Clark: Do you look back on it, would you consider it a mistake that you used them or are you happy about that decision?

Moon: No, I mean, I wasn't a heavy user or anything. It was just a temporary thing and I haven't messed with them for almost a couple years now and I don't expect that I ever will again. I stopped doing them because the testing came in and I also realized that the body just wasn't meant to be on that stuff for a long, long time. And what was going to change, you just have to either keep going the way the schedule was or stop at some point. It was like, coming in there and looking good was fine, but then you just have to keep going with it where it would have stopped.

Clark: Is there any truth to the statement that going to the WWF, the biggest wrestling company in the United States, can change a person's personality and the way they treat others?

Moon: I suppose, but there are very few. That's just the personality of each individual. I think some of the guys, no matter what they do - if they're complimented or they're doing well - they're going to get a big head, I'm sure that's happened, but not very often. I can perhaps think of only a couple occasions like that.

Clark: Did going to the WWF help boost your confidence?

Moon: Yeah, I was pleased because a lot of guys to get in there, they have friends or somebody to help get them a job there. And I didn't have anybody in there. They called me to inquire what I was doing at that time. So, I didn't call them. That made me happy, that they realized that I had some talent. But on the same token, when I got there, I wasn't in the position I wanted to be in. And I couldn't understand why.

Clark: How hard has it been for you in this business to find honest, true, real friends who wouldn't go stab you in the back to further their own success?

Moon: (laughs) Very hard. It's unfortunate. That's the negative side to the business. I've been in this business for eight years and I can count on one hand the number of friends I have. And you learn. You think they are, but in the end, you find it's almost non-existent. It's too bad.

Clark: Did you find that when you got to the WWF that there were a lot more of the jealousy problems or the stabbing in the back problems going on up there than in the AWA?

Moon: Like I said, I wasn't up very high, so who was going to stab me in the back to get the opening matches! But yeah, I kind of saw what was going on.

Clark: What do you think has been the secret to your success being able to stay with WWF for about three and a half years or so?

Moon: Just working my ass off, not complaining, being on time, and doing what they ask. I thought that was the key to longevity there, and obviously it is to some extent. But, I also thought that would be the key to get better position, which obviously it wasn't. Some guys bitch and complain and get things. Whereas, if I were to bitch and complain, "We don't need this headache, we'll get rid of you," which they did.

Clark: Do you think it was very tough for you working in the WWF as Paul Diamond when there really wasn't much of a personality presented or much of a character presented for you?

Moon: Yeah, yeah, it was a little frustrating, when you end up getting beat on TV. From other than the first place that I worked, everywhere else I kind of had a half-decent spot. It was not easy. I guess I just kind of realized that it was a job and money was money. But like I said before, just being a competitive person and being an athlete, it was not easy to accept that.

Clark: I've noticed that you haven't done many TV interviews, does that in any way relate to who you are as a human being? Is there any awkwardness about doing the interviews?

Moon: How should I say it? In a regular life, I am a shy person. But once I am the character that I am supposed to be, then there's no problem. It's a whole different ball game. It always intrigued me, too, because I know how shy I am as a person and then to go out there in front of people and absolutely have no inhibitions at all.

Clark: Was it easier for you to do it under the mask?

Moon: No, that part of it didn't matter at all. It was the fact of getting out there and being Paul Diamond. Doing the thing under a mask, it was the same way but in a different way.

Clark: What would you say was your favorite role that you did in the WWF, either Paul Diamond, Kato, or Max Moon?

Moon: Well, I thought Max Moon was going to be it, and it was. But, I enjoy working no matter what it is. My least favorite was being Paul Diamond just because of the position I was in. I just enjoy working, so whatever it is, I try and do the best I can. Being a heel or a bad guy or whatever you want to call it, I enjoy that more than anything. But, the Max Moon thing, I realized that I could be something really good for the kids and for myself. I enjoy that. I will probably have to change the name or change the costume a little bit, but I'd still like to take that basic idea somewhere because I do believe in it. I mean, there's not a character out there right now in wrestling that the kids can really identify with like that. I believe in it and I'd like to make a go of it.

Clark: Did you ever come up with any of the characters you wrestled as or give them ideas for them?

Moon: No. And that's another thing, there was never a character planned for me. It was just like, "Oh, this guy left, we'll stick you in there." I was kind of like the utility man, basically. With the Orient Express, Sato left, so I was there for them. Same with Max Moon, they thought Konnan was going to do it but things didn't work out.

Clark: Did you feel that you were appreciated for being there when they needed you?

Moon: Yeah, I think so. Being appreciated and getting pats on the back is fine, but show me my paycheck or let me advance and let me try and contribute more to what I think I can do. There was no problem with that, I got plenty of compliments, but that doesn't pay your bills.

Clark: Do you think that the character Kato was at all a bad stereotypical presentation of what exactly a Japanese wrestler is? And do you think that it was disrespectful at all to the Japanese who take wrestling extremely seriously over there?

Moon: Well... maybe to a certain little extent. But, I don't really think so. I think he had the wrestling ability and stuff and I wasn't poking fun at them as Kato. So no, I don't think so.

Clark: Would say that the attitude about having to be bigger to make it in the WWF or a big organization like that is a bad mentality to have?

Moon: Yeah, I think so. You know, I just don't understand. You look at their talent right now and they've got so many huge guys and I think the people just get sick of seeing two big guys just... not doing anything. There's some guys there that are good athletes but are limited by their gimmicks. And then there's other guys that are just huge, and that's all. Once you see a big guy, maybe you'll go out the first time because he's so huge and so muscular, but then if he can't wrestle, why would you go back to see him again? I think with some of the small guys, if they can train the people, they can keep coming back and giving them different stuff. With some of these big guys, it's always the same stuff.

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Moon: How should I say it? In a regular life, I am a shy person. But once I am the character that I am supposed to be, then there's no problem. It's a whole different ball game. It always intrigued me, too, because I know how shy I am as a person and then to go out there in front of people and absolutely have no inhibitions at all.

Clark: Was it easier for you to do it under the mask?

Moon: No, that part of it didn't matter at all. It was the fact of getting out there and being Paul Diamond. Doing the thing under a mask, it was the same way but in a different way.

Clark: What would you say was your favorite role that you did in the WWF, either Paul Diamond, Kato, or Max Moon?

Moon: Well, I thought Max Moon was going to be it, and it was. But, I enjoy working no matter what it is. My least favorite was being Paul Diamond just because of the position I was in. I just enjoy working, so whatever it is, I try and do the best I can. Being a heel or a bad guy or whatever you want to call it, I enjoy that more than anything. But, the Max Moon thing, I realized that I could be something really good for the kids and for myself. I enjoy that. I will probably have to change the name or change the costume a little bit, but I'd still like to take that basic idea somewhere because I do believe in it. I mean, there's not a character out there right now in wrestling that the kids can really identify with like that. I believe in it and I'd like to make a go of it.

Clark: Did you ever come up with any of the characters you wrestled as or give them ideas for them?

Moon: No. And that's another thing, there was never a character planned for me. It was just like, "Oh, this guy left, we'll stick you in there." I was kind of like the utility man, basically. With the Orient Express, Sato left, so I was there for them. Same with Max Moon, they thought Konnan was going to do it but things didn't work out.

Clark: Did you feel that you were appreciated for being there when they needed you?

Moon: Yeah, I think so. Being appreciated and getting pats on the back is fine, but show me my paycheck or let me advance and let me try and contribute more to what I think I can do. There was no problem with that, I got plenty of compliments, but that doesn't pay your bills.

Clark: Do you think that the character Kato was at all a bad stereotypical presentation of what exactly a Japanese wrestler is? And do you think that it was disrespectful at all to the Japanese who take wrestling extremely seriously over there?

Moon: Well... maybe to a certain little extent. But, I don't really think so. I think he had the wrestling ability and stuff and I wasn't poking fun at them as Kato. So no, I don't think so.

Clark: Do you think Vince is or was trying to go back to focusing on the basics of wrestling and lessening the gimmicks and stuff?

Moon: No, not really. What I don't understand is, he said we're going back to wrestling and then he came out with a clown. I just don't see how that's going back to wrestling. He didn't exactly talk to us about it but it came through the agents. I was happy to hear that, though. I thought, "Wow, here's a chance, here's an opportunity for some of us guys who can do something." And then Shawn Michaels started doing well and Bret Hart did, too, so I thought, "Wow, there might be a chance." But, there's guys that have great ability, like Undertaker, there's a big guy who can do anything and all, but just because of the character, he can't do it. That's what I don't understand, if you want to go back to wrestling. I think they've just carried their characters way, way out of line, like the voodoo thing. It's kind of way, way out there. I think with all this glitz and the characters and stuff, we've driven off the hardcore wrestling fans and now we've picked up the white collar people, but they bring their kids just because it's just like movies and show business, and they really don't understand wrestling.

Clark: At the point before you started as Max Moon, if they had asked you to do some type of silly gimmick like a Ninja Turtles routine or something outlandish like that, would you have done it?

Moon: Yeah, that was my thing, just do whatever they asked. I wanted to keep a job. I was in no position to start demanding or say, "Hey, this is stupid." I mean, if you want a job and you want to make money, you have to do what's asked of you.

Clark: Would you have any trouble dealing with yourself as far as respecting yourself in regards to what you were doing?

Moon: If it was something really, really goofy, I might say yes at first but then somewhere down the line, I might not be able to deal with it. I can't really say because I've experienced it. But yeah, I know me, I don't think I could keep going with something really silly.

Clark: Being around all those gimmicks and stuff, was it hard for you or is it hard for you at all to still care and respect your profession, pro wrestling, or to feel proud that you are a professional wrestler?

Moon: No, not always. If people didn't know I was, I didn't make it a point to go ahead and tell them whatever I did. Also because, how do you answer to an intelligent human being when they ask you about something like the voodoo thing and some of the goofy stuff with the clown wrestling? I mean, you can't insult the people and bullshit them. And they'll ask, so what do you tell them? That's the reason why if they didn't know, I wouldn't go into what I did.

Clark: Do you think that there could have been a big merchandising future for Max Moon with the WWF?

Moon: Yeah, yeah. I don't know if there were any plans yet about it, that never really got that far. I imagined when it was first developed, I thought for sure that that would have been part of it. Since it's for the kids, I just don't see why they wouldn't. I was very excited about it. I thought this was something that might bring in some good money as far as the marketing part was concerned.

Clark: It seemed as though the Max Moon thing was getting over good and things were really looking up for you, and then all of a sudden, some problems developed in late December. What happened?

Moon: I mean, you've heard the rumors (about him having a conflict with another wrestler in the WWF over a personal and private matter that is of an extremely delicate nature in each person's private life). I believe that's why I was let go, because of those rumors which weren't true. They handled it in a different way because they knew if they did it that way that legally they couldn't let me go for that reason. But, I'm sure about the reason they let me go. They didn't say anything. They sent me my release in the mail.

Clark: Was that a slap in your face, do you feel?

Moon: Are you kidding, a kick in the ass is more like it! Yeah. After working there for three years, there was a lot of ups and downs and I made decent money and I worked hard. But, it wasn't just me, one thing I noticed- and I just don't understand why- what's so hard about being a businessman and say, "Hey, this happened, and I don't have anything for you right now. Thank you very much for your three years. And we'll see you." I mean, that's human. I thought that's just the way to do things. I'm never interested in that part of our life. I don't know how it is in different businesses, if it works the same way. I've always been in sports and been an athlete and stuff. I played soccer, and if they let you go, they let you know. I assume it's like that in football and other sports as well. But here, nobody would talk to you, but just send you a note. It's a different way of doing things, I guess.

Clark: Did these rumors going around hurt you?

Moon: Yeah, I suppose. I mean, when all that came out I went home and had my arthroscopic knee surgery. When you're not there, you can't defend yourself. By the time I got back about a month, no matter what I said or did, it didn't matter. Once it came out, that was it, I couldn't anything to erase it. So yeah, it hurt me.

Clark: What kind of communication did you have with Vince about this matter during that time?

Moon: Right around Christmas, some of the guys called me, as well as you, and told me that I was let go. At that point, I didn't even know. I tried to call and I didn't get anybody until after New Year's. And they denied that I was being let go and that I was going to still stay booked. And then the dates I was supposed to go back, the television tapings, there was no word from them yet. I got a hold of somebody again and they said that they were just letting my knee heal. However, I had a match for Royal Rumble that got cancelled. And then I went up to the Raw taping and I was told there by Vince himself that he was going to keep me and that and that everything was going to be fine. He said he would let me know if anything was going wrong or if there was any problems. So after that talk, I really felt good. I thought hopefully things would get back to normal. And then after that, I went on the road for about five days, a five day tour, and things had just obviously changed. I had been winning all my matches prior to that and all of a sudden I was wrestling Skinner- and he's a heck of a guy and I respect him- but when we wrestled before, I always won, and now all of a sudden, I was losing. I thought, "Well, maybe he still going to punish for whatever." I was just trying to get through it. And then at Royal Rumble, they gave out schedules or booking sheets and I never got one. I was trying to figure out what happened, what was going on. And they were adding me to a bunch of shows and that we were going to go over my bookings the following day. And then Marty Jannetty was let go so they sent me to fill in for him over in Europe. They said, "Here's your contract for going to Europe." So I thought, "Well great, I'll just get my other bookings when I come back." I returned from Europe, a Thursday night, and the following Monday was a television taping again. And I had no plane tickets, no schedules, nothing. So that Friday, I tried calling him three times and nobody got back to me. The secretary didn't say anything. And Tuesday, I got my mail.

Clark: Were you hurt at all about how Vince had told you he was going to keep you on and everything, and did you think he was honest?

Moon: He said that he was being honest with me when he said that. I wouldn't have minded it so much, even if he said that he was going to keep me on, if he had called me after I got back from Europe and say, "Hey, we're just having problems, we tried, but we can't. I'm going to send you a release." That's all he would have had to say. I told him that day when we talked at Raw, I said, "If you want to let me go, there's no problem, just please let me know." So, that's the only thing that I'm kind of hurt by. If you don't expect anything from anybody, it can't hurt you, so I guess that's the way to look at things.

Clark: What did your release say about the legal rights to Max Moon?

Moon: It just said that the rights to the Max Moon thing, the name and all that, would remain with the WWF. It said my contract expires as of May 16 and, "Good luck."

Clark: Did it upset you that he was looking for another wrestler to do the Max Moon thing during that time when he didn't really tell you too much about what your future looked like?

Moon: I knew about it because I talked to the person at the end. It upset me because I had asked him about that and he had denied it at that time when the guy, Ted Petty (Cheetah Kid), got a tryout. I found out about it and then I asked about it and they denied it. I just saw him at an independent show and I talked to him about it. But like I said, what are you going to do, that's their way of doing business. And my new motto is, "If you don't expect anything from anybody, they can't hurt you," that's the way I'm going to go on from now on.

Clark: What effect has this had on your life?

Moon: Well, I kind of hit a low point there in Europe. But, I rebounded and I've got the Japan tour, I've got some independents, I've got a bunch of time to train for the Japan thing and I'm going to be in the best shape that I've ever been in. I feel I can work well with the likes of Liger and guys like that. From what I've heard, they need someone like that and I am going to try and be the best that I can be. It's nice to be home for a little bit. For the last three years, I haven't hardly spent any time at home. As long as I get enough independent work to get through until July and then that's when I go to Japan. I'm kind of putting all my eggs into that basket right there, to try and do something with Japan.

Clark: What are you going to do with Max Moon after May 16?

Moon: What I'm trying to do is, find a way, maybe through magazines and stuff, to change the name and so I don't have any problems with it.

Clark: Do you own the costume and how was it first using it?

Moon: Yeah, I paid \$1,000 for the costume. So if he doesn't want me to use it, he can buy it back from me. Maybe the first couple times it was tough to wrestle in it, but it's comfortable, it's just spandex. They first called it the Comet Kid the first week and then at the next TV they came up with the name Max Moon. Somebody mentioned to me that they had to change the name because the Comet Kid was a comic book or something and that it was trademarked.

Clark: Do you think all those rumors going around is an example of how this business and the wrestlers can sometimes be very cruel?

Moon: Yeah, absolutely. There's so many things that pop up that are not true. When I first started in the business, the guy who trained me, Boris Malenko, said, "Believe nothing you hear and only half of what you see." That's the best way to describe it. You get bad breaks in life and then you've just got to keep on plugging along, and that's what I'm doing. It was a bad break, but a lot of other people have had worse breaks. I'm still healthy and I still have my life and my wife and my family. Now that I'm not working for the WWF and I home sometimes, maybe I can have some kids. It's nice to be home. It's a little bit of a pain that you've got to stay on the phone and be calling people to get work, so that's a little drawback. But other than that, working basically weekends, Friday and Saturday night, and making almost the same money that I made with WWF working the whole week, is not too bad.

Clark: Do you think that there are going to be some major changes in wrestling in the near future, maybe see territories come back stronger?

Moon: I think in a few years you might see that picking up again. There's a lot of things going on with the WWF legally and stuff like that, so that might contribute somewhat. Also, there just not being as successful as they were in the mid eighties when no matter where they went, no matter who they put on the card, it sold out. Now I think the territory where they're successful is shrinking. If they leave some of these places alone for awhile, territories will start up again.

Clark: What else might you be thinking of doing outside of wrestling?

Moon: I'll be 32 years old this year and I'm happy in Tampa. There is life after wrestling, believe it or not. If things don't pan out, I'm not really worried, I'll just go back to school or something. Way back when I went to college I took some computer courses and before I started for the WWF I went back to school and took a computer course and it got half-way done. In fact, I just checked one out last week, an eighteen month course in computer programming, because I know the longer you wait, unless you're making big, big money where you're secured and you quit at forty years old or something cause you have a bunch of money saved or something, so far that's not the way it's gone for me so I have to prepare for future times - a regular life! But this Japan trip is a big thing. I'm just going to see how things go.

INTERVIEW BILL WATTS

The following exclusive interview that was published in issues #26 through #29 with Bill Watts was conducted via telephone from his home in Tulsa, Oklahoma on April 15, 1993.

Clark: First, could you please tell me about your education earlier in your life and how you got started in the wrestling business?

Watts: I wrestled in high school and I played football. I was the first all-American high school football player in Putnam City, to the best of my knowledge, and I was in the Jim Thorpe High School Football Hall of Fame here in Oklahoma. I was recruited to Oklahoma University by Bud Wilkinson on a football scholarship, and I wrestled in the off season. Then, I think it must have been my sophomore year, I was in a car-train wreck and I was unconscious for a couple of weeks. I came out of the hospital under 200 pounds, I weighed about 245 normally. Of course, Oklahoma University believed in small and quick at that time, they had Wahoo McDaniel down to 188 pounds. They had me down to 215 or 229 pounds, I was the biggest man on the team. They just didn't realize that kids were starting to grow. I got on weight training after the car wreck, it took me like six months to even be able to get back to where I could do a simple somersault and come up in a hitting position. My ribs were crushed and I had a whole lot of internal injuries. It was amazing that I was alive. But, a friend of mine got me on weight training by accident. You've got to realize, back then weight training was tabooed for athletes because coaches had no knowledge of it. They saw the typical guy that got into weight training was the timid, non athletic guy that wanted to build up his body. When he did that, he had no natural coordination or no athletic coordination. So the coaches saw this guy build up his body and then they'd watch him be totally uncoordinated, and they would then surmise that the weight training made him uncoordinated. So they said, "Don't lift

weights." I had gotten back to my normal body weight of about 245. We started out on weight training and worked really, really hard, and seven months later I weighed 315 pounds. I gained 70 pounds in seven months. I never took a steroid in my life, I was just at the perfect growth age and worked so hard at it. It just transformed me into a superman. So, I was way too big for Oklahoma football, but they wanted me to stay on a wrestling scholarship. But I signed pro with the Houston Oilers in the old American Football League in the second year of the league. Then I got released there, I had an altercation with the head coach. I thought Bud Wilkinson should have had a different philosophy than curse or demean people. Back then a lot of pro football coaches treated you like a slave. In the off season there, I came back home and Jack Brisco was wrestling at Oklahoma State University, Wahoo McDaniel had gotten into pro wrestling, and Dale Louis, a heavyweight at Oklahoma University, had gotten into pro wrestling. And Jack had always been trying to talk me into going into pro wrestling, but the pro wrestling in Oklahoma was junior heavyweight wrestling and very far behind the times. The only athlete that we considered a head was Danny Hodge, he was so head and shoulders above everybody. But, you didn't really respect pro wrestling when you were an amateur. Wahoo and I were out imbibing in a few brews one evening and he had to cash a check. I asked him what he got it for and he said for wrestling. I said, "How long? For a month?" He said no. I said, "A week?" He said, "No, for one match." I said, "My gosh." Because you've got to realize, back in the late 50s when you were in college, they told you that if you worked hard and got to where you were making \$25,000 a year, you were financially secure and successful. And Wahoo had, it seemed like the check was for \$1,500, \$1,000, \$500, I don't know. But I said, "My gosh, who do I have to kill to get that?" I went to see LeRoy McGuirk but they had junior heavyweights and they didn't want me. They had me work out with Sputnik Monroe, who was a great old hand. The old tradition was they stretched you first. I don't think Sputnik could stretch anybody, but he sure couldn't stretch me. I guzzled him pretty good. The next day they had a work out set up with everybody there and none of them decided that they could handle the situation. So they just told me that they just didn't have anything for me. So Wahoo helped me get started, he sent me up to a guy named Bawb Eskison in Indianapolis. When I got there, Wahoo was getting ready to go back and go play pro ball again. Bawb Eskison wasn't really paying much attention to business, of course I didn't realize that then. Jim Barnette owned it and he wouldn't use me. There was a professional football league there, Continental Football League, and a friend of mine was the defensive line coach and he asked me to stay there and play ball. I did, and Dale Louis started wrestling there. Dale talked to Bawb Eskison again and so finally I broke into wrestling and had my first match in Portsmouth, Ohio in 1962. Bill Miller was a big help to me, as were Mark Starr, George & Sandy Scott, The Von Brauners, Karl Gotch, Art Nelson and people like that. As a matter of fact, it was Art Nelson who called me and said, "Take your bag when you go down to Portsmouth tonight and ride down with Dale because I'm not going to show up. He'll have to use you." Stan Nelson, his partner, called me five minutes later with the same story, so I rode down, and that's how I got my first match. My second match was with Joe Blanchard and my third match was with Don Leo Jonathan. What a phenomenal athlete Don Leo was, it was just mind-boggling. He was 6'8", 308, he could do nip-ups. I mean, unbelievable balance. A natural athlete. That was my third match and I had met Barnette, he had come back to a big show in Indianapolis, and I was hoping he would discover me. But I think that's when he was in the middle of the most torrid part of his affair with Rockettes, so I don't think he had wrestling on the mind! And that's where I saw Dick the Bruiser wrestle. I had about ten matches and then I came home on the Christmas holiday and got into an altercation in a bar where several guys jumped on me and broke my fist. So, LeRoy made me a special referee with a cast on. I created so much excitement as a special referee that when my cast came off, a couple of his guys that were top-half said everything was stale there then. They said, "Man, book him against us." We started drawing a lot of money which created a lot of jealousy among the junior heavyweights. So LeRoy said, "Man, you're out-drawing my junior heavyweights, you've got to get out of here." He sent me to Texas for Morris Seigel. The first night in I won the Texas Championship. That's a whole another story, it really wasn't supposed to be that way, but that's what happened. I stayed there for a while. After that, I went up to play ball. Verne Gagne called me and Norm Van Brocklin wanted me to come play with the Minnesota Vikings. I went up and worked out with the Vikings. I met Verne, met The Crusher, met Larry Hennig. They wanted me to stay up there and be on the taxi squad, work out and get my timing and everything back. I said, "Fine, as long as you'll let me wrestle professionally." Jim Finks was the general manager at that time and he never let anybody from the Vikings wrestle. I told them, "I'm sorry, but I can make a hell of a lot more money wrestling than playing football." You've got to remember, back then a lineman made \$8,000-\$12,000 a year. So, I came home. From there, I think Lou Thesz took me to the west coast for a deal with Strongbow. Then I went to Vancouver, British Columbia for a few weeks. I was there when they shot John F. Kennedy. I started drawing money there against Kiniski and Jonathan, but I was getting paid real badly. Rob Fenton was the promoter and I jumped him about it, and he said, "Kid, as green as you are, you're lucky to get to be on the card." I said, "You're paying four or five guys more than I. And when I got here, there was nobody in the building, now that I'm here, we're drawing money. If you're going to screw me, I'm not going to stay." So, I went home. LeRoy booked me and then I did some stuff for Dory Funk Sr. where I was driving from Springfield, Missouri on a Wednesday night all the way to Amarillo, Texas. I worked a "mark out of the crowd" deal where I was

razzing all the guys on the card, and none of them knew who I was. I had them all pissed off- Fritz Von Erich, Killer Karl Cox, Mike DiBiase- Ted DiBiase's dad. Dory wanted me to jump in the ring on a certain deal and I said, "Are you going to tell anybody?" Dory said, "No, we want to really make it realistic." I said, "Well I've got news for you, if any of them come at me, I'm going to knock them out." So that's what I did. Then they all came running out of the dressing room, they thought I had jumped in on DiBiase. Killer Karl Cox realized that that wasn't it and gave me the old Hi sign. So that's how that started. I met Wild Red Berry by accident, it seemed like he was home, Pittsburgh, Kansas, for the Christmas holiday. They brought him over to Joplin, Missouri and teamed him with me for a holiday show, and we had a little situation happen. The promoter was so damn dumb he wouldn't even have wrestling put on TV there, all he did was have a live interview on the Saturday night news. We were doing an interview and we got all excited, and it sold out. Well, Red Berry got so excited about it that he went back and told Vince McMahon Sr. about it. I was wrestling the next Thursday in Wichita Falls, Texas on a 4-H farm that didn't even have a telephone. All of a sudden, the police came and got me for an emergency call. I thought something had happened to my parents or something. Well, it was New York (WWWF) calling, their offices were in Washington, DC. Of course I was so naive, I said, "I don't know if I can come up there or not, you'll have to ask Mr. McGuirk, that's who I'm working for." They said, "We'll take care of Mr. McGuirk." They called LeRoy and he realized that it was a big opportunity for me, but I didn't know anything back then. I went to Washington, DC and got over real big in New York. I decided that Sammartino was making all the money, instead of being his partner I'd rather be against him. I turned against him. We sold out Madison Square Garden, it was the largest crowd that was ever in the old Garden for any event in its history. And of course, the reason for that, because we sold out more often than that, is because the fire marshal wasn't there that night and they filled the building. But, it did make the paper that it was the largest crowd there ever. I think it sold out at like 3 o'clock in the afternoon. They ran the Garden every three weeks back then and there was only one main event. I had quite a run there. We sold out the old arena in Washington, DC four times with Bobo Brazil, who was a big star, and usually you only get to wrestle them one time. The match that established me in New York was going to a twenty minute Broadway with Killer Kowalski in Washington, DC. It was so good that Vince Sr. was standing there and was just amazed by it. Killer Kowalski was a great performer at that time, he had become a vegetarian so he was not near as big as he used to be, but he had great endurance. There, the great ones there were Bruno Sammartino- who to me is one of the quality guys that's ever been in this business, Gene Kiniski, Waldo Von Erich, Dr. Bill Miller, Jerry Graham- by then he pretty much lost control of himself with his alcohol, Don McClarity, Pedro Morales, Gorilla Monsoon- he and I were the tag champions at one time there. So I already had ideas and I'd get to the people who'd influence the decision makers about my ideas. Although I didn't realize that I had this ability, it was just me trying to make a living. I had a two year run there and then I went to California for Roy Shires, and I was going to work there a few weeks and then go to Japan. But I won the North American title there. The next week, he flipped out. Roy was the kind of promoter, he was a genius, but he never told you anything, you had no idea of what to expect. I got along with him real well, I just didn't understand him. We eventually became great friends and had a lot of respect for each other. I had been staying with him for about a year and a half and I was only wrestling about three nights a week, and everything was real close. I got to wrestle guys like Ray Stevens and Pat Patterson, they were probably the best team in the world at that time. Dominic DeNucci was out there, Joe Scarpa- Jay Strongbow- he was my partner for a while, Jim Haiti was my partner for a while. Then I got into a multi-level business and quit wrestling for a while. I always had wondered if I could make money if something happened to me in wrestling. Athletes have always got to figure if they get an injury or something, so I built a good multi-level business. I found out that I could be successful with another business. Then in 1968 I went to Verne and stayed there until 1970. Up there, The Crusher was one of the all-time greats. Dick Beyer was up there as Dr. X, he was great. Larry Hennig and Harley Race was the best team in that era. Jack Lanza, Bobby Heenan, Billy Red Lyons, Red Bastien, it was a great crew. Of course, Verne Gagne was ahead of his time and he had a real feel for the business and he believed in the athletic type of it. LeRoy McGuirk and I stayed in touch by phone and he was having a lot of trouble by then. He asked me to come home to run his business for him. He still wasn't sure of me as a young guy so he made a partnership arrangement with Fritz Von Erich, Verne Gagne, myself, and gave Danny Hodge a small piece for Danny's long time loyalty to him. So, that's how I started a promotion in 1970. When I started in 1962, I'll never forget Art Nelson said, "Kid, you've got a college education, you're a smart kid, get out of this business and go home, the business is in terrible shape, you can't make over \$25,000 a year." They key word to me was \$25,000 a year, I'd been taught in college if you made \$25,000 a year, you were rich. So I stayed in the business. The business was just starting to explode right around '70, it really started to get big. Verne's area got hot, Chicago, Winnipeg. So here I came back to Oklahoma and it was the shits. It was horrible. They had over-the-hill guys, never-was-beens, and LeRoy being blind, I had the stooge system there where he'd keep everybody fighting each other. That would keep him in power so to speak. I was his partner and had to put up with all his stooges. It took me a while to deal with it but I learned a tremendous amount from LeRoy. It was very frustrating. LeRoy was a great man in his day. And by that time, he drank pretty heavy and it started to effect him and he just had a lot of psychological problems. But I still learned a hell

of a lot under him. In 1973, Eddie Graham asked me to come to Atlanta. There was a trade between two stock holders, Lester Welch and Buddy Fuller. Lester had stock in Florida and Lenny had stock in Georgia, Buddy went to Florida and Lester came to Georgia. Ray Gunkel was alive then and decided that he didn't want to go for it so he was going to break away and form an opposition. The partnership was Ray Gunkel, Paul Jones, and Buddy Fuller. He was going to go against Paul and Buddy's tradee, Lester. So they took all the boys, only one guy didn't go, that guy was Bob Armstrong. When I got there, a bunch of us came in and put a show on with Paul in the old city auditorium. It was amazing, it had Jack Brisco, Dory Funk Jr., Hiro Matsuda, Fritz Von Erich, but nobody in Atlanta knew them. Back in the regionalized days, they didn't get the nation wide exposure. It was like, the crowd was in a vacuum and would just sit there and watch. I went out and they put me against Bob Armstrong. Because they knew Bob, we had a hell of a match and it got a good crowd reaction. Eddie Graham was getting interested in my career and asked me to come down and run it, although Lester was the general partner and Paul was the promoter, he knew they had to have someone strong to run it in booking. Eddie gave me some stock, he also gave Jack Brisco and Buddy Colt some stock. He gave them small pieces and gave me 10% of the ownership. I started running that and we did very, very well. The whole time, Anne Gunkel was setting up an anti-trust suit which we were all very naive about. We didn't know what the hell anti-trust was. Ray wrestled in Savannah, Georgia, had a heart attack and died. Anne, her booker was Tom Renesto- he and Jody Hamilton were the Assassins- and they went on with Ray's plans. We were competitive and did very, very well. Jim Barnette wanted to come back from Australia and Eddie brought Jim in, and Jim bought Lester Welch out. Jim came in and things were more stable. And we had Jerry Jarrett come in as booker. And I went to Florida in 1974, Eddie gave me ownership to come down there and book it. It was the hardest I ever worked in my life but it was the most rewarding. It was the largest bottom-line profit for the stockholders ever in the history of Florida. Eddie Graham was a genius, he had a lot of devils he fought- but we all do- but that period of time he was just such a supportive man and he stimulated my thought process and I learned so much. He used to say, "Why are you a college guy, come down here and work for me. I didn't even get to junior high." And I said, "I came to get my Ph.D." We used to laugh about it. Of course, that's where I made Dusty Rhodes the "American Dream" in 1974. We had Pak Song, we had Gary Hart- he was at his height, Buddy Colte, Mike Graham was a young babyface, Bobby Duncum, we brought in Dick Murdoch, Terry Funk, and we just literally tore Florida wide open. We really had it hot. And then I went home in 1975 and LeRoy and I bought Verne and Fritz out. We were partners until 1979. LeRoy was impossible, so we split up. In 1979, I formed Mid South and I took Louisiana and Mississippi, and he took Oklahoma and whatever else we had- it was only part of Missouri and part of Texas. And then after a couple years, I came back up here and bought LeRoy out of the old company. In Louisiana, the largest they'd ever done back around 1970 was \$400,000 gross. And I took it to over two million dollars a year in a fairly small state. It was real successful and everything was going great. Vince decided on his new game plan, which basically I did the same thing. I tried to convince a huge New York Stock Exchange firm called Kenny National Services to do a very similar operation, but Vince was in the media areas, he had New York already, California was on its ass because the promoter really didn't do a very good job for many, many years. So Vince all of a sudden had that and he had a million dollar war chest. I totally disagree with him philosophically about wrestling, but without a doubt, he's one of the smartest in marketing and he knows how to position himself and his talent better than anybody in the business. He just took the thing to a completely different deal. I think he's hurt himself because in his rise to power, which is very intoxicating, he crushed a lot of people. I think he killed off the independents. And to me, the independents were very important. I tried to tell him, "Leave everybody there, by golly." Then you've got a changeover in talent when you want. Give them a bone when you come into their area and co-promote it with them. You can still take all the damn money and you've got the big nationwide operation." It would have been much healthier to keep everybody going, but he didn't see it that way. Naturally, he was in a position to dictate so he changed the very fiber of this business. As I said, he's a genius. Hitler was too, he destroyed Germany. So, the only guy that can stop Vince is Vince. And he's been doing that pretty good for the last couple of years. And the only person that can compete with him is Turner Broadcasting. But unfortunately, they haven't got a clue as to what the hell they're doing. And so they're no threat. And with their tremendous assets and their position in the media with their broadcast, they should just dictate wrestling worldwide. But they shoot themselves in the foot. They keep wanting to reduce wrestling to a business that's like producing widgets. They don't think it's unique. They think if they keep putting corporate people in charge that don't know what the hell they are doing. And they want to reduce it to their corporate understanding- it's got to walk like a corporation, talk like a corporation, and dress like a corporation. It will never work. So when they have no leadership like that... I mean, when I got there in May, they said, "Be sure to hold the losses this year below \$1.8 million. That was the big buy word. Bill Shaw said, "We can't lose over a million eight because that's what I promised the board." We lost \$421,000. Quite a difference from that to \$1.8 million. I said, "I'd like a letter of commendation to everybody in WCW for the fine job we've done." Well hell, they wouldn't write it because that would have acknowledged what a fabulous job had been done. Irregardless of what everybody said, we'd come in and cut some costs and we'd done some things. They were scared to death they were going to lose over \$1.8 million and that's still even with a bunch

of funny bookkeeping that's not exactly kosher as far as showing a true operational picture. They were projecting a net operating loss in 1993 of \$6 million. I turned in a budget that was going to make a quarter of a million dollars profit. But they want to sand bag it and they slowly, just slowly encroach upon everything you're doing. You have to justify why you're there or why you do something a certain way everyday, and they don't understand it anyway. So Vince is the only one that can stop himself. One thing that's so key for Vince is that Vince is in the wrestling business and he understands the wrestling business. His problems are pretty easy to identify. Without a doubt, he understands marketing, he understands positioning, and he understands the wrestling business, so he's the only one that can stop himself.

Clark: What are a few of your greatest experiences during your life?

Watts: The birth of my children and to live vicariously in them. Oh, there's a lot of big experiences. The ones I think I relate to business wise was naturally to at such a young age go to New York City and be successful, to sell out the Garden like that. I think we sold it out like three or four times. Also to sell out the Cow Palace in San Francisco, the HIC in Honolulu. You start building a confidence that you knew what you were doing. Verne Gagne, we were both babyfaces, decided to book us against each other in Minneapolis at the big building there and it drew a huge gate. I thought it wouldn't draw with two babyface wrestlers against each other. There's been so many exciting times. One of the most exciting times for me was when Dusty Rhodes truly started believing he was the "American Dream." I'll never forget it. It was at an interview session at the Sportatorium in Tampa, Florida. He cut an interview where I knew he was where I was trying to get him to be. Goose-bumps broke out on my arm, just went right down my arm. I knew I had created a superstar. But he had all of it, it was just a point of guiding him and encouraging him and conjoining him. When I went to WCW, they wanted me to fire Dusty. I said, "Well wait a minute, I want to see where his head's at, he's one of the most creative men in the business. All he needs is some guidance to force him to follow through and to have some continuity. And we were getting all those systems in place because Dusty's a fabulous guy. He loves the business and he's very creative. But when you're under the gun like that, sometimes it gets so big and there was so much television. Gosh, if you had seen what we produced in October, November and December in television, pay-per-views, Clashes and extra television hours, it's mind-boggling. The staff that writes *Roseanne* and all the top NBC shows couldn't do that, and we produced all that stuff. It's stupid, it is so stupid. In one of my first two weeks there, I presented a game plan to succeed for WCW, and they rejected it because they were afraid to go that strong. To me it was simple, you took WCW and you put it head up with WWF, make it run aside. You run our Clash of the Champions the night they run their pay-per-views and you run our pay-per-views right up against the night they run their big cable deals. To give the people a choice. They were scared to death of that. Everything you'd come up with that would be a winning concept for them, they'd reject it. Do you realize that I made the first black world's heavyweight champion in the history of the business with a major operation. And I know I've heard the guys say Iceman King Parsons was for Dallas. Shit, Dallas was a regional thing just like mine was. There's never been a major worldwide organization like the NWA, WWF, or WCW that's had a black world champion. So I made Ron Simmons the world's champion, he's got all the credentials in the world. And we thought with Turner Broadcasting we ought to be able to get Simmons in Ted Turner's box at the Braves games which is picked up nationwide on TV every time they play a game. Shit, we couldn't do that. Would I be able to get him on the sideline of the Atlanta Falcons? Hell, they've got every country western singer and even a guy named Zeus who played some bit part in a movie, was down there with the Buffalo Bills playing. We couldn't do that. We thought we could get him with the Atlanta Hawks right in the good seats where the crowd would pick him up. We couldn't do that. We figured we could get him on *Larry King Live*, Vince was on there. We couldn't do that. Nothing on CNN. Do you realize TBS just produced a big documentary on the history of Harley Davidsons? They had James Caan, they had the guy that played J.R. Ewing on *Dallas*, all these different stars talking about their Harley experiences. There's nobody that rides Harleys anymore than the wrestlers for WCW. Sting is a big Harley rider, Barry Windham is a big Harley rider, I am too. Not one wrestler in the show. So here you have all this stuff that could be put together to build wrestling and you can't get shit, you can't get any cooperation at all. The head of TBS Sports doesn't particularly care for wrestling, in my opinion. Ric Flair told me a story one time that when he was on the sidelines when Steve Spurrier was the coach, because he's a friend of Spurrier's, the TBS crew was shooting the game and the crew told him later that when they picked him up on the sidelines, that the head of TBS Sports said, "Don't pick him up, I don't want to show a wrestler on our broadcast." How stupid can you be? We couldn't get shit for Ron Simmons. Bobby Bowden did a nationwide uplink before our pay-per-view to help promote Ron Simmons. He took a day of his holiday and did it. They retired his number at Florida State. Bobby Bowden did everything for Ron Simmons but TBS didn't so shit for him. Here's how stupid they are- you do a three hour pay-per-view, two hours and fifty minutes. When they produced it on cassette they want to cut it down to two hours. I said, "How dumb can you be?" Who would go buy a movie with a third of it gone? See what I mean, they're penny wise and dollar foolish. Vince doesn't do that and he's the best marketer in the world. I said, "You've got to copy Vince's strengths and you've got to ignore his weaknesses." But they wouldn't do it. Did you ever go to the top rental deals in Atlanta? None of WCW's shit is on the

shelves, all of Vince's stuff is on the shelves. "It costs more to do a three hour tape. Well, they don't want three hour rentals." Well, they damn sure have all of Vince's three hour rentals. You see what I mean, it was insane. One hand doesn't know what the other one is doing. They've got a director of marketing there, the only thing that was brought to me to try to get me to pass it on the market was a game, with no specified advantage to it except some percentage of something. It was a very nefarious deal and they wanted me to make a wrestler "The Master of the Snapping Hold." What wrestler would want that laid on him? One hand doesn't know what the other one is doing. Who did they shit on when I resigned? Jim Ross, probably the most valuable guy at WCW. A guy, who to me is the best commentator in the business. A guy who during one pay-per-view passed a kidney stone and never left the booth. He busted his ass. He lives, eats, breathes it, contributes to the booking meetings. His 900 line did \$500,000 a year, he wrote Missy did about \$200,000 a year. And they take him off the air. And he's got a radio show on WSB that's clear-channelled, it reaches forty states or something that, it's the top sports show. Brother I'm telling you, the guy that made that decision, and I know who it is, you do too, but we won't call it, the guy wouldn't have enough brains to piss out of a boot if the directions were written on the heel. But he's a very, very powerful person at Turner Broadcasting, so that's what you get into. It's just like when we met one time with the executives of TBS, they wanted more programming. And I said, "Let's pull some of the old, great matches out. We can't produce anymore with the number of guys we have. We've mixed it so many ways that nobody gives a shit anyway." Hell, when I got there, every star we had had been a star in 1987. That's the same problem Vince has got, it's stale. People are crying for new talent. But it takes time to develop new talent when your system has been shut down. They said, "No, don't do it." I said, "We're going to do it anyway." Ross and I pulled out a series on Ric Flair that rebuilt the NWA title. Because after the Chono-Rude match in Philly, it stunk the joint out. We wanted to rebuild the prestige. We pulled the one where Steamboat beat him and the one where he beat Steamboat and all that. It got such a rating that the TBS guys then said, "We want Ric Flair on every week." Really for me, it was a deal saying, "Hey Ric, we've got a place for you here. We'd like to see you come back." Because no matter what anybody says, I think Ric Flair because of his attitude always has the best match on the card. I think Ric Flair has two or three years of great performance left in the ring and then he can be a great broadcaster. That's one of the things that depressed Flair, because everybody else had put matches on there of him getting killed. It caused such a rift with some of our talent that's never drawn any money, and they were mad because we put Flair on. I mean, most of these guys talk about the money they've drawn... I got a kick out of one guy that's one of WCW's stars, "Well, I drew all this money for Vince and he didn't pay me right, so I quit." And I thought, "You did, huh?" When Vince McMahon was drawing money, anybody he put against Hogan drew money, anybody he put on the card drew money. It was his operation that was drawing the money. When a wrestler has never figured a program, an angle, or a finish comes and tells me he draws money, I look at him and think, "Boy, I don't know what shit you're smoking, but it sure is making your head big." It's just like when I got there, they wanted a clean program, so did the public. I instituted the steroid testing on November 11 because if you remember by the Havoc I had two guys that I lost to personal problems. So I wanted drug testing. We tested on November 11. We were supposed to have a drug program. We'd already met with a real good law firm who was drawing a real comprehensive, thorough drug program up. It was supposed to be ready by the test. You probably know of how many guys tested positive on it, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out who was on roids. You also know who refused to take the test. In February, there was still no written program. So then I really raised hell. They got the program written immediately because it was all ready, and we had to do was sign off on it. It was supposed to be in place February 15. Of course, I resigned on the tenth and they've never seen it. For me, if you were positive, we were going to get rid of you. You've either got to have a drug program or not. But see, some people say, "We have a no smoking program at Turner Broadcasting." Of course, that's means, "Just don't smoke in front of me." To me, that's hypocritical. So here's the funny thing, the three things that all the sheets were addressing when I got there were the three things I acted on. The funny thing is, as soon as I'd signed Flair, they started knocking the fact that Flair couldn't even help us. They dropped the roid issue because we started complying, we faced it and we were addressing it. It's still a joke with the WWF. They all say how tough the policy is there, I guarantee it's selective. It seemed like somebody said Paul E. Dangerously said I was anti-Semitic. I wasn't anti-Semitic. I didn't even know he was Jewish when I went there. I've never been anti-Semitic. I believe in God and I read the Bible. I'm profane and I'm a lot of bad things, but I do believe in God and I do believe in the Bible. It says if you curse a Jew that you are cursed of God, so I would never be anti-Semitic because it's against God's word. I'm not anti-Black. I have my opinions about a lot of things. And then there's people that denigrate and dilute and try to scare you into not having an opinion. And all of that stuff, I don't think that the people that make the decisions at Turner Broadcasting ever supported me philosophically, because they don't understand it. So, they didn't support it. Therefore, I think that I was the guy they were in so many ways told to hire. So they had to discredit me and the only way to do it was to sand bag me. Nobody that I wanted to fire corporately at WCW could I fire. I went on the record right off wanting to remove several people that were anti what we were doing. You couldn't fire them. Well, if you've got people that you want to get out of there and you know they're not doing anything and they know they're not, and they know you don't like them, what does that do? They turn against

you. So then, they're crying and knocking you all the time so the guy that's up in the North Tower is listening to them, all my distractors. He said, "Well, you intimidate people." Yeah, I intimidate people when they're not doing their job. He said, "You've got a dressing room mentality." Who do you think I'm working with, rocket scientists? What do you think they're used to? Here you've got a bunch of people that hadn't been doing their job and then collecting all this damn money, and I'm trying to make them go to work. I mean, the mess the syndication is in is so stupid. Why would you pay Turner Programming Services to syndicate your shows, you can't control what they do, and most of them don't like wrestling. And it's not the right image, they'd rather syndicate CNN or *The Wonder Years* or the movie packages or the cartoon network, not wrestling. They think all wrestling is wrestling, they don't even understand the difference and don't care to learn. They get paid \$600,000 last year to syndicate our programs and then it goes to \$1.2 million this year. And they've lost 30% of our network, we're under-delivering unbelievably. Here's what they say- "The ratings are down and we can't sell it." Shit, the ratings were down before I got there, the difference was, they also lost the key stations because they didn't maintain and service the relationship at the station. So WCW has to have its own syndicator, a very strong person that answers to WCW and that has wrestling as their only interest. It's a twelve million dollar income stream that's under-delivering. But, they don't want to do that. They want to do it their own way or they go hire some idiot who should never be hired or they go hire somebody that's been fired in the past or something like that. Not the right people. So you see what I mean, they say, "We'll you're running it, but we're going to tell you what you can and can't do, and we really don't like what you're doing. We don't believe in what you're doing." Let me tell you, no matter what Vince was doing promotionally, I would go in a different direction to give the viewing fan an alternative. Otherwise, you're just a copy of him. But certainly, the things he does well marketing wise and positioning wise, we should emulate. But we didn't and they don't. And then they hire a guy to be in charge of television production who has never produced a show in his life, who was a fill-in for another wrestling promotion because their top announcer was hired by the WWF. And this guy sells them a bill of goods on what he's going to do for wrestling. Well, check their ratings since I've gone. Since October we didn't have below a 2.0 on WCW Saturday and it was averaging a 2.6 for eight weeks, and then I think it did a 2.8 and a 2.7 or something like that. Then it did a 3.1 the Saturday after the last pay-per-view because everybody knew Flair would be there. I'm just assuming and I'll guarantee you it's probably fallen since then. Somebody told me the other day they had a production setup at Center Stage with no truck. That's all that finger pointing. We wanted to spend money ever since I went there to improve the graphics packages and change the sets on all the shows. We were told, "No, you've got to cut costs, you can't spend any of this money." Kip Frey spent more money on one set than we wanted to spend on all of them. But then they were going to go hire a television production guy and let him spend the money. And then they said we hadn't had any ideas. We've had all those ideas, everything I did there I documented my opinions on and everything else for whatever it's worth. But, it was ignored. I think that WCW is positioned to fail. I think Ted Turner realizes the value of wrestling, he knows what wrestling has done for his station. It was what made it a superstition, it was the first program that had over 100,000 homes watching it, and he understands it. But he is so insulated and he's so busy with other things and it's so minor to him that he turns it over constantly to people who do not understand it and they're more concerned with how you dress and how you talk than what the hell you're doing.

Clark: Do you think that there's still good money to be earned in pro wrestling now or do you think it is just that bad?

Watts: I knew what the state of the business was and I knew where we had to go, and I figured it would take about three years. First of all, you have got to develop new talent. You had to develop your own farm system to where you could get them experienced, but you had to have new talent. And you had to have a concept of training them. You had to go back to getting some athletes, not just going to the gym and getting some guy and say, "He looks good and he looks like he's probably been on steroids and he's got a big body," and you give him a gimmick and he can't even really do the gimmick, so there's nothing legitimate in the whole thing, sign him to a big contract and start booking him. The New Japan Pro Wrestling was in much the same thing four or five years ago. Their big superstars retired and they started building their young stars. They had a dojo system where they'd make them come in and scrub the floors, do the wash and cook the food. They wanted a guy that wanted to be in wrestling more than anything in the world. They didn't go out and pay guys with overinflated egos to come into wrestling. WCW does the opposite, they go buy you into wrestling. So, a guy that doesn't give a shit about wrestling, can't wrestle, doesn't know anything about it, all he wants is the money. That's the caliber of athletes you get. I think the business has gone so far one way, it needs to go almost 180 degrees the other way. But they say, "Why are you trying to attract a hardcore audience because only four percent of the people in the United States believe wrestling's real anyway?" I said, "That's what you don't understand, I don't give you a shit what they believe." Nobody ever believed it was real. If you talked to ten guys in the front row in the 60s or the 70s or the 80s, and said, "Do you think wrestling is 100% legitimate?" They'd practically all say no. But they'd say those two guys are mad at each other. I think you've got to have some mystery, some drama, some suspense and some unpredictability, and you've got to have some athletic ability.

They've been trained since about '87 that it's a cartoon. It's not going to happen overnight that you're going to train people back that there's more to it than just being a cartoon. We could have at least got the company where the bleeding would stop, we were in the process of that. But, it's not going to be easy. The athletes that have been slopping at the trough of overpaid and overegoed are going to fight that. But pretty soon they'll conform or else they would be out of a job. And the attitude was already changing except for a few guys. We had a few test cases. And all you have to do is stand firm. Because let me tell you, if you lost all of them, what difference would it make? You couldn't have drawn any less money or any less ratings. So none of them were indispensable. Sting would have stayed anyway, Sting is probably the least of the problems. He works hard, he's not on steroids, he was your top babyface. Most of the guys that have been in the old days like Ricky Steamboat or Barry Windham, guys like that that understood the ethic, they would have been there. So you lost a few primo madonnas, it didn't make any difference, you needed to lose them. But see, the corporate executives at TBS, they don't understand that. They think you're building a team to win a game like the Braves. Well hell, you're not, you're building box office attractions. So you need change, you don't need the same people year after year. They think they have to have them all. One TBS executive told me, "The reason the Braves had a turnaround was because John Schurholtz went in there and cleaned up the front office. He quit the vulgarity, they had to dress corporately, they even put guys in uniforms selling the concessions in the stands. And oh yeah, he made a few good trades." I like just fell out of my chair. For him to reduce what's happened to the Braves to that analysis, it proves to me he doesn't know what the hell he's talking about. But, he was running our company. If all you had to do was make it look corporate to make it a success, every sports franchise that has a corporate ownership should be successful. Again, we knew where we were going and from day one I went there, the people I work for would go ask other people, "Does Watts know what he's doing? This is a small industry." What kind of confidence did that give me or anybody working for me? So all the detractors said, "Just ignore him, he ain't going to be here long." That's what I fought everyday, it was a very brutal situation, to be under such a microscope just trying to do a job. Hell, I knew what the hell we were going to do and I knew where it needed to go, and that's still where it needs to go. Until it goes there, there's only one company that's going to make it, and that's Vince McMahon. Because he has to make money, he doesn't have all these other companies to fund his losses. Now then, if you're going to talk about an independent making money, it's going to very, very hard for one simple reason. People in television, people who buy programming, they're followers, they're not leaders. Their perception, because wrestling is in a slump, is that the public has lost interest in wrestling. They don't understand that they've had Hulk Hogan there for ten years, that they've had all these top stars- Randy Savage- all these great stars, that they've had them for five, eight, ten years. And I don't care that you're not going to eat chocolate cake every week for ten years, it's stale. It's been mishandled, the whole system has been broken down. Wrestling is in a slump but they perceive the public has lost interest in it. What it is, the industry did not give the paying public what they want to see. Then, they (people in television) have already been spoiled because of the war between Crockett, WCW and WWF. They started paying stations huge amounts of compensation in order to be on the air. So all of a sudden, a station doesn't want to play your wrestling unless you compensate them. An independent can't afford to do that. The next thing is, television programmers, since they don't understand wrestling, they look at wrestling for production value, for graphics, for cameras, for lighting, and that's how they judge it. An independent can't afford to spend that much on production. Let me tell you, WCW doesn't even come close to spending on our production what Vince McMahon does. And yet, we outrated him on cable every week. And we had to produce more with less stars and with less costs. How can an independent do that? At least at Turner Broadcasting you get a special rate on the truck and a lot of inner-company help on that, but an independent can't afford to do that. The third thing is, if you're an independent, as soon as you build a star that could draw you some money, WCW or WWF will pick up the phone and he's gone. That's why I was starting to work back with Jimmy Cornette and I guaranteed him we would not take any of his talent unless he was ready for us to. That's what you have to do to rebuild the independents. You've got to assure them that they're not getting in bed with a tiger that's going to eat them. But that's not corporate mentality, they don't understand. So again, they shoot themselves in the foot. Why is Jerry Jarrett still in business? He doesn't build anybody that's over 6' tall unless they're family. Hell, Vince and WCW doesn't want any of those little guys. So what you have is stagnation, no turnover, no new development, and how's a young promotion going to overcome compensating the stations, glitzy production and keeping the talent? Independents can't do it these days. But, they're going to finish killing it off. It'll come back in some form. It happened once out of Los Angeles, it happened once out of Chicago where they had a similar situation. Never like this, but it will probably survive. But right now it's a very tough, tough thing to do.

Clark: How successful do you see Vince being in the future?

Watts: Vince McMahon's future is up to him, he controls his future. I disagree with them philosophically, he calls his family entertainment and he doesn't even want hardcore wrestling. And I think he's hurt the business because he's taken the mystery out of it. As soon as you tell everybody that it's not real and it becomes public knowledge, most people don't want to see it, they'll take their kids to see it. Let me

ask you, if there was a great movie out there, would you want to know the ending of it before you went to it? How many times did somebody start telling you about the movie and I'd say, "Wait a minute, don't tell me, I want to go see it myself."

Clark: Well there seemed to be a great secret to *The Crying Game* and there was a big deal about nobody telling anybody about the plot.

Watts: Right. If I had known what *The Crying Game's* punchline was, I wouldn't have gone. As Barnette says, I'm homophobic. I'm not homophobic, I don't like fags. But I mean, that's my personal opinion. I have a right to that opinion. Fags don't like straights. Otherwise, then why wouldn't they seduce them? But, that's just my personal opinion. But the bottom line is, and I tried to tell the TBS guys about this, in a John Wayne movie, everybody knew he didn't kill the Indians, but they didn't get up and shake hands and ride off in the sunset together. Without having a kay fabe policy, the wrestlers do now. They also didn't tell you the end of the movie before it started, which with Turner Broadcasting and all the leaks in it, you guys know what the hell's going to happen in the arenas or the pay-per-views before it happens. As a matter of fact, how many times I can remember we had some matches run where they had advertised title changes before they happened because somebody else is sticking an ad in that we had no control over. And that's how lose it was up there. That's where Vince, with his difference in philosophy, he shoots himself in the foot. Because no matter, what there's got to be a mystery and an aura of danger. If everybody thought that there would never be a wreck in a car race, do you think they'd still have that many people there? Why the hell would all these people pay and go see over the hill boxers fight each other? Because they still think it's fairly on the up and up and somebody might get knocked out. Shit, the fans turned my cab over when I wrestled at Forbes Field and it took forty policemen to get me to the ring to wrestle Bobo Brazil in Washington, DC. You used to have to fight for your life. None of the modern day heels have ever been in a riot because the fans don't believe anything they're doing anyway. The closest we had to it was Vader. But I mean to tell you, these guys don't know what the hell a riot is. One thing Sting said to me, it was so funny, "Well Bill, you know how the business has changed." I said, "You're right Sting, we used to have to draw money." With WCW, you don't have to draw money because you have everything guaranteed. At least Vince still makes them draw money to get the money. At least Vince knows how to promote. Again, the only thing philosophically he and I disagree on is that his perverted- to me it's perverted because it's not what I believe in- concept of how to present wrestling where it's all a farce. But brother, he's such a strong marketer and he makes so many incillary ideas that feed his company that he still makes a hell of a lot of money. But he was more vulnerable this past year than he's ever been. I don't think Hogan can save it for him for two reasons. No matter what, Hogan's about sixty pounds or so smaller from what I understand. Number two, he's lost a lot of his credibility with the fans in that he was a part of the lie. Number three, I don't think he would ever dedicate himself with the intensity he had when he was becoming a star. He also was at a megatrend in time where he became bigger than the business. He was the first wrestler that became a big movie star and he was the first wrestler on all those big talk shows and all the big media things. He became bigger than the business. That's one thing Vince did extremely well. And shit, TBS wanted to go out and have a contest to find the next Hulk Hogan. I mean, what the hell are you going to do with all those idiots? That's how little they understand. "Well, let's just go copy that." Dusty was told one time he had two or three days to come up with seven new wrestlers and they all had to have a name because they had seven new dolls to sell. They marched in and had seven new guys outfitted. None of them could do a thing and never drew a quarter. But that was their concept. I guarantee you before it's over, TBS and WCW will hire Hollywood script writers to start writing the storylines for wrestling. So then how much suspense are you going to have, how much mystery are you going to have? They'll have that writer on the talk show, he's the one that will get on the talk show, and he'll be telling what's going to happen for the next three months. So you don't even need to watch, he's already told you what's going to happen. Vince McMahon has really shot himself in the foot. But I think he realizes it and I think he's trying to do some things. Hell, at least he's paying the bills, he doesn't have to lay it off on anybody else. He either makes it or breaks it on his ability. He understands wrestling and he damn sure understands marketing.

Clark: Are you sad to see what the sport has become or do you still even consider it a sport?

Watts: I'm sad to see what it's become and I'm ashamed to be in it, with the people's concept of what it is today. Again, I think that the camaraderie is gone, I think there's so many things that were in it that made it a great, great sport. It's all gone. With WCW, your position on the card was determined by your contract. If you had \$8 million in contracts, how could you get a new star and fit him into that? If you've got a guy guaranteed to a half a million dollars a year whether he draws five cents or doesn't, he's going to be booked and he's going to be booked in the top matches. You're not going to have him in the openers doing jobs for half a million a year. Where's your incentive?

Clark: Do you feel that an organization in today's age can survive and make money with the main focus of their product being athletics?

Watts: The NWA back when they were focused towards the athletic aspect, they were doing good. I don't mean totally because wrestling has always had its show biz in it. They were beating Vince in Philly, in Baltimore, everywhere they ran with him. He came in with Roddy Piper and Hulk Hogan and everybody against me in Oklahoma City and I beat his ass. Beat his ass. He couldn't draw a dime anywhere I was running against him. I'm not trying to say that it can succeed just with athleticism, I think you've got to have it all. But you've got to have the element of danger and you've got to have the mystery. And there is no mystery and there is no danger in today's wrestling. The only danger is, is one of these clumsy sonofabitches who don't give a shit, breaking somebody's back, breaks a job guy's shoulder. That's the only mystery. There sure isn't any mystery about the outcome of the matches. There sure isn't mystery about much of anything.

Clark: Where do you think you were headed with WCW?

Watts: I think we were on the correct concept. I thought we were set to turn the first important corner. I don't think the winning corner, but we turned the first corner. We were getting a lot of new talent in. We were getting a better attitude in the dressing room. The funny thing about the dressing room attitude was, the guys on guaranteed contracts wanted to know how many days off they had a month and the guys on contracts that were based per event wanted to know how many times they were booked during the month. That's the kind of attitude you need. The young guys were all going to the gym the days off and working out in the ring. We were going to eventually have our own school, our own training camp, just like the Japanese did. WCW, they'd see somebody like Bruce Baumgarten who's an Olympic champion, and they'd say, "God, just get him here. Buy him." Well, Bruce Baumgarten has never wanted to be in pro wrestling. Bruce is a purist. He's an Olympian, he does not want to be in pro wrestling. And I respect him for that. But shit, my bosses wanted me to, "Get him down here. We'll give him anything to be in this thing." What the hell, why do you go get a guy who doesn't even want to be here? If you give him enough money, he'll come. What do you have? You've got a guy that doesn't want to be in it. I'll tell you what, Sting, if he wasn't making \$800,000 a year, he wouldn't be in it. He's at the point in his life, he's a good businessman, he's got his gymnasiums going, he's at the point where he doesn't have to do it anymore. Same thing with Hulk. You've got to want to be in it and you've got to love it above everything in order to be in it. That's the kind of athletes you've got to get in it. Wrestling has gone so far overboard to show biz that it has no credibility. But still, WCW, we were doing the right thing. We just couldn't get rid of the dead weight. We couldn't get rid of the people who didn't understand what we were doing and that just wanted to save their damn job. I'm telling you, the memo wars that go on there are mind-boggling. It's more important to feather your nest and suck up to somebody and try to get rid of somebody or put them down or zing them or stab them in the back. My back looked like a porcupine. I was glad to get back to see some of the kids that cared. The ones that cared and knew what I was doing, they supported it. Supported it 100%. The people that cared and supported it and understood where we were going saw the progress we were making. A lot of people didn't see it. The funny thing is, even the critics, we were making progress on almost everything they said. And they're so in such a critic mode that no matter what we did, they're going to criticize us. That's like Halloween Havoc, we do a 0.96 buy rate, we marketed that thing great, and then we walk out there and can't produce. Well shit, you think it didn't cut my guts out too that our preliminary matches were outperforming our main events? I can't go in the ring for them.

Clark: Why exactly did you come back and try with WCW?

Watts: I think for the challenge and the fact that I know what's wrong with the business and I know how to fix it. What I didn't understand was, when they said they gave me total autonomy, I thought they would, and they did not. And the next thing is, I didn't understand just how f_____ up it was inner-company in Turner Broadcasting. That how many people are f_____ with wrestling that don't know what the hell they're doing, and you have no control over them. We had no control on what promos TBS runs. If they promoted wrestling half as much as they promo the Braves, our ratings would be better than the Braves. If they promoted us as much as they promoted the Hawks, we'd beat the Hawks so bad that they'd look like a step-child in the ratings. They practically don't even promote us, and we still produce better than almost anything else. And they said, "Well gee, you're not doing 4.0s on the station." Well shit, they've got nothing on TBS that's doing 4.0s. Not only has wrestling downtrended, the whole cable TV audiences have downtrended. TBS' overall station averages downtrended. They can sit there and give me some statistics or some bullshit, but it just doesn't add up. It's like when they said the ratings have gone down. Well hell, the ratings were down already. I've got an announcer making half a million dollars a year that I can't tell him what to do. All he wants to make it is his show instead of what's going on. He talks right through what the hell's going on, makes fun at what's going on. Not a bad guy, but when he knows he's sitting in the driver's seat, why cooperate? I mean what the hell, he doesn't prepare before he gets there. So what, you can't fire him.

Clark: Do you feel that not having seen much wrestling in the five years you were out of the business before you returned had any effect on your performance at WCW?

Watts: No, I think wrestling stood still or went backwards. That's what everybody tried to lay off on me, that, "It's changed in the five years you were out of it." That's bullshit. The emotion that makes people buy tickets is the same damn emotion. The day we switched the title to Ron Simmons in Baltimore, there were people crying in the audience. My friend, that's the emotion like the old days. That's what everybody wants. Hell no, besides that, I was bringing the best brains in wrestling back together. I had Dusty, I was bringing in Greg Gagne- has a lot to offer to the business, he's grown up in it- Mike Graham, Bill Dundee, we were getting a lot of people into the wrestling aspect. It's just we were overloaded with the amount of production we were having to do, with facilities that can't handle it. If you'd see the facilities we had to do the production and post-production, and then compare it to Vince, it's a joke. Vince's television is light years ahead of WCW's. The production facility that Keith Mitchell has to run, we don't have the equipment. WCW Saturday Night wasn't even edited in-house.

Clark: Was it being edited by non-wrestling people?

Watts: We were finally getting that addressed too. They had guys that had been in wrestling, but they had been on strictly the production side of wrestling. If you're late at night, you're tired, you'll let something slide. We had finally addressed that. We were going to put a wrestling guy in the booth that had control over the wrestling content with each editor. First, I put Ole doing that and Ole was trying to watch it, but it was too much for him to watch. But, he was making headway. And we finally had come up with a concept that, by gosh, we're going to have a wrestling guy that's in control of the content of the final editing. And if he had anything that they had to referee then he would have brought it to me. We were delegating a lot of things out there and getting the right people to do it, but it takes time. It's been run like shit for three and a half years. You're not going to go turning it around in nine months, but we made a lot of progress. I left WCW in better shape than when I got there. I think most of it they've given back.

Clark: So overall, do you feel your reign as executive vice president of wrestling operations at WCW was a success?

Watts: I don't have to lose sleep over my effort there or the progress we made. We had nine major injuries, we had drug problems, we had a lot of things we had to address. But we were making progress. Anybody that knows wrestling knows we were making progress. Jerry Jarrett called me right after and said, "My God, Bill, you were making progress. You were giving everybody in the business hope again. If you can't do it, nobody can." Dory Jr. used to call, people like that. Terry Funk's made a lot of comments, he's just lobbying for the job.

Clark: Did you succeed in meeting the goals you had set for yourself?

Watts: Well, you had to regroup your goals because there were too many things that you had to address on a daily basis that you didn't realize were going to be a problem. And you couldn't control the syndication, you couldn't control the editing, you couldn't control the promos, you couldn't control the leaks. I mean, it was a monster. So finally, I had to shut it down and I closed it down to three guys that knew what I doing. Then I started adding to the group, trying to keep it to where everybody didn't know what we were doing before we did it. And we caught some people. It was good. When Sting switched the title to Vader, nobody knew but Sting. Vader didn't even know until he got there that night. And Sting did a fabulous job. Sting, to me, showed just times of brilliance there. I know he and I sometimes are philosophically different, but I sure don't cry anything about his effort and especially when I understand what all he's been through before I got there. That's the thing too. So many guys have been through so much shit and lied to so many times before I got there, they didn't figure I'd last very long anyway. So, they didn't want to conform or give up anything. I can't blame them. If I was in Sting's position, nobody'd f___ with me. He's got them by the balls. So for being in that position, Sting's not a bad guy to deal with at all. He was sincere, he was easy to do business with, and he contributed.

Clark: Talking about your reign statistics-wise, do you...

Watts: My first goal was to get the Omni back healthy. When I got there, the show that was booked in there did \$10,000. Well, we never did \$10,000 again. We did as high as \$70,000 (for Starrcade '92 PPV). So I think I got the Omni back on track. The next thing, I was trying to cut the pay-per-views and start building the pay-per-view and getting a price for them. I think we were making headway. My next thing was to get WCW Saturday Night, was our flagship show, get a handle on it to where it was consistent. And we were building consistency and we were building a consistent rating. And that's all without getting to spend any money. So yeah, some of my goals I was able to meet. Some of them were very frustrating because I could not. By the time you get over there and you excite a bunch of people and you get them trying so hard, busting their ass so hard, you can't just leave them in the lurch. Until finally, you read the handwriting on the wall that no matter what you do, it ain't going to get done. They're not going to let you do it.

Clark: But didn't the pay-per-view buy rates drop...

Watts: Well, the first two were already booked when I got there. The first one that was mine was Halloween Havoc, that did a 0.96. We did a great job on it. The reason they dropped after that was because we had such a shitty performance. But God almighty, you figure if you can market something and get it there, you could at least perform. All the main events didn't perform. The match with The Steiners and Doc and Gordy was the shits, and Gordy didn't show up. Jake and Sting was the shits. We were scared Jake wouldn't even be at the show and didn't know that Gordy wasn't going to be there until the night before. The match with Rude and Chono was the shits. When Paul E. and Madusa can be the highlight of the show, you're hurting. That's what we were doing, we'd get something hot... Do you realize we got Vader hot, and we lost him for months for knee surgery. How do you overcome that? He was the hottest thing we had. Then you get Jake hot, and you lose him. You can't lose the guys like that and maintain any momentum. You get Rude injured and then The Steiners get into their shit and they ride the injury clauses. So all of a sudden, you're without everything you had gotten built. We had the momentum two or three times there. When we lost Vader, we had to switch Rude into Simmons, there was no reason for Rude and Simmons. It wasn't built and it wasn't meant to be ever, but we didn't have anybody to put against him. That tore down what we were building with Rude. We were building the momentum again, it was showing in the WCW Saturday Night, in that the rating had stabilized and started growing. That's just life. Everything just does not work exactly the way you want it to, but you just go ahead and go. We had some good things, Maxx Payne was kind of different. Too Cold Scorpio added a little spark, he was green and not very smart but he was an exciting kid. We were at least trying things with other people. Benoit, a great athlete, look at how long it took us to get his contract worked out. Brian Pillman was a real breath of fresh air, that kid was just absorbing it like a sponge. We were coming along, but again, it takes time. I'd like to see them do it more faster but when you reorganize something that's screwed up for three and a half years, you have got to get down to the basics before you rebuild. I think we were on the right track. I thought Ric Flair was the first bright spot. And Sid Vicious was wanting to come back under a very structured performance related type of contract and to reprove himself. He has that box office ability. I thought The British Bulldog was another piece of talent that could fit into our scheme of things. I thought we were really starting to get some exciting talent and the ratings were starting to show people were excited, never knew what the hell was going to happen, and they were pleased to see it. They were pleased to see some of the stuff we did with young Bagwell. We were doing a lot of fun things. I didn't ever feel that Turner Broadcasting would make the commitment necessary. I thought I could do it in a faster time but I just didn't realized how entrenched and how much sand bagging goes on.

Clark: So before you went in there you had a much different picture of what it would be like in that position?

Watts: Yeah, I didn't realize because I didn't know the inner-workings of Turner Broadcasting. If all you were doing was dealing with the wrestling, it wouldn't have been quite as hard. It still would have been hard, but not quite as hard. But hell, you had to overcome Turner Broadcasting. I said many times, I felt my biggest thing to overcome there was Turner Broadcasting. As a matter of fact, they had Bothan Allen do a study and one of their guys said, "I'm just amazed at the lack of cooperation between companies and the lack of communication within companies here at Turner Broadcasting."

Clark: Were there other things you did that you felt were positive?

Watts: We were excited. We had our direction set almost a year out. But, several times we just had to change it because things happened. With Flair, we actually could then look at planning pay-per-views a year or a year and a half ahead and know we were going to draw money and be on target because Flair gave us another ingredient. Hell, when I got there, it was either Sting and somebody or you didn't have anything. With Flair, it didn't take anything away from Sting. I thought we had really rebuilt Sting and he became our "Raider of the Lost Ark" type of guy. We put him in some real provocative danger scenes that were easy to market. I was really excited about Barry Windham's attitude and the direction we were going to go with him, and his intensity and his excitement about it. He's always had all the ability, he's just always been taken to a certain point and dropped. So he never did really feel that anybody was ever going to do anything for him. So he always just did what he could to get by. Barry was really pumped and really busting his ass in the ring. He's one of the best workers in the business. He just needed to be motivated on a regular basis and have a goal, and he was starting to get that way. I was looking at all the positive aspects.

Clark: On the other side, do you feel there were some negative things that you did in there?

Watts: I'm sure. You know, when you get so caught up in getting shot at everyday, I think you get paranoid and you get caught up in paranoia. I think for damn sure there were some things. If I had to do again, there are a couple things I'd do different. I don't think anybody does anything exactly the way they want to or they're just lying about it. There were some things negative I did. I don't want to get into them, that's negative. I mean, hell, I made a lot of mistakes. There's no sense in going into

those things. It's not going to do any good for anybody. Nobody's going to study this thing on how to do it anyway because nobody's going to get to do anything there. And if Ted sells TBS, where will WCW be?

Clark: What would you describe as your method to motivate the talent to work harder and take pride in their jobs? Having to do with contracts and then motivating them?

Watts: That's a hard thing having to deal with them contractually in one hand, in a business sense, and coaching them in the other sense. So that's a tough deal wearing both hats. But, it's necessary. It's like Mike Ditka said, "I'm used to dealing with self-motivating athletes. Now it's become where you're a babysitter." And Mike Ditka is a great coach. The people that hired me at TBS said, "Ditka, it's passed him by, he's a dinosaur." I said, "You all are crazy." How many guys can take somebody to the Superbowl? Let's stop and look at management for Ditka. What has management done for him? Name me one star that you could build a team with that management has signed for Ditka since he won the Superbowl. Then, let's name the Superbowl stars that management lost. Ditka's a hands-on guy. He's a dressing room mentality guy. And they said, "See, he can't get a job." Can't get a job, he's getting paid \$900,000 to lay out this year. He'll get a job. That's their understanding of this business. They just don't understand it. They told us in one of the meetings, they said, "This is no different than a widget business. We're tired of people telling us it's unique." Let me tell you, there are very few people in wrestling that ever really understood it anyway that were successful year after year after year. So, that's what you're battling there. To motivate wrestlers, I'd tell them when they did good. I was constantly telling them when they did good. I would also tell them when they did bad, and tell them why they did bad. One of the greatest things that the young guys, the kids with their heads screwed on right, appreciated- we used to bring them right out of the ring and show them their match. Ole would sit there and go over their match right then on tape. You've got to realize, I came in when they used to do three balls shots in a match. Nobody got beat, nobody got hurt, they're hitting them in the nuts. And we're family entertainment. And I stopped that. They didn't like that. I started making them be on time. They didn't like that. I started making them show up. They didn't like that. I started making them stay when there was a championship match, until the end of the card. They didn't like that, they said, "Why should we watch the matches?" Why should you when you're getting paid no matter what? In the old days you'd watch the matches to see what the guy's doing so you could do it better. Who likes discipline? If you were out there playing football, would you want to run wind sprints? No. So then, if you were the boss up there, you'd call up the guys and say, "Gee, what do you think about Bill making you run wind sprints?" They say, "We don't like it. We don't want to do that. We shouldn't have to do it." See, that's TBS' concept, they call down to the guys and they ask them if they like what I'm doing to make them have discipline. They've never been fined there for missing matches. Ron Simmons got fined three times. The last one was \$5,000. Shit, he was the world's champion and missed three engagements. Scotty Steiner, I fined him \$10,000 for missing his TV title. I said, "Ron, I gave you a better deal. You're world's champion and I only fined you half as much." Ron understood it. He didn't like it, but he understood it. I said, "Look at the opportunity I've given you, and you've missed three times."

Clark: You think most of the talent was motivated by your methods?

Watts: Why deal with most. You've got to understand, you don't deal with most. You'll never please everybody. There's no human alive that pleases everybody. Do you think Jimmy Johnson pleases everybody? No. You lay down the rules the way they need to be and you get the guys to conform. You don't ask them if they like what the hell you're doing. You've already got the tail wagging the dog, why would you go ask the tail what the hell it's doing. In the wrestling business, I've seen talent and they're never fully happy. I've never seen many of them lay down in the ring. I don't think the talent was laying down in the ring over a lack of motivation. I think they were trying. I think most of them don't know what they're doing. Hell, we couldn't even lay out a finish. Our finishes had to be so simplistic, I couldn't believe it. I even laid out one myself one time and Mike Graham said, "Those guys can't do it." I said, "Mike, that's so simple anybody could do it." They screwed it up. The business has regressed because there was no challenge mentally. How can you challenge anybody mentally to do anything when they get paid the same no matter what they do. That's what people that have never been there don't understand, they don't understand that. They don't understand what it takes to go big time because they didn't have to. If you're getting paid guaranteed no matter what you do or whether you're sick or you're hurt or whatever, there's no edge. There's no edge. It came out in the Atlanta paper, funny thing, that there's about ten guaranteed contracts in the NFL, and most of those are quarterbacks. Pierce Holt just got the new one with the Atlanta Falcons where they guaranteed, even if they cut him, put him on waivers, didn't play him, if he gets hurt, he gets paid. To me, that's dumber than naming shit.

Clark: Do you think some of guys didn't like your methods because you were coming in there and making major, major changes?

Watts: I think some of them got an attitude problem and I think some of them

conformed. Some conformed and some got an attitude problem. But that happens with anybody in anything. So, it was no worse or no better. We would have eventually cleaned house and had guys that had the right attitude. But, that takes time. It's nothing I haven't had to do before. Before that, since it was a wrestling company, I was supported. Here, they cried to the bosses and the bosses would ring their hands and hold their hands, "Oh, we're sorry, Bill's just too hard on you, this, that and the other thing." I mean, it's f_____ ridiculous. It's like a babysitting job, it's like Ditka said.

Clark: Did you find yourself having a hard time dealing with the office personnel on a day in and day out basis?

Watts: No, I ignored most of it. What the f_____, I don't have time to deal with the office personnel. That's what they would say, that I don't accept their input. Why would I make a "Master of the Snapping Hold." And I didn't have the time. Maybe in a year I'd have had time. You put people in charge and you delegate things, and you don't have time to listen to everybody. I mean, that's ludicrous. That's not even sane. Nobody does that, if you're running a company. I made Brenda Smith office manger, I thought she did a great job. Nobody else did, but I did. But, I listened to a lot of problems and I coped with a lot of problems. You're working eighteen to twenty hours a day, you didn't have time to listen to all the little nit-picking. You'd get so sidetracked doing that. What everybody want to do, John, is they want to digress and they want to analyse the bacteria accountability and human kindness of my regime. So they want to pull it apart into little bitty pieces but none of them know what the hell the overall picture was anyway. So really, I could never explain to you the whole thing or justify it or anything else. I don't have to. But, I could never do it and make you understand it anyway unless you'd been there. If you hadn't been to the show, you don't understand what it is until you get there. You can only be an outsider looking in. That's why I always said that Meltzer and Keller ought to start their own wrestling promotion. Because they're experts on it, they'd have to be instant successes. But, I haven't seen anything start out yet in their name. The other thing is, thank God there's not been many statues or memorials erected to critics in the world. Because critics generally don't accomplish anything, they're just tearing down things. So no matter whether I did good or did bad, at least I was there. I know I did something good. I know I was in the right direction. I know I did some things bad but I know most of all I had no support. If I was there, Dusty Rhodes would still be where he is. I was bringing in a booking committee. They started saying that I had to have Sharon Sidello on my booking committee. For what? So then all of a sudden, I'm anti-women. I'm not anti-women, never have been. But, what the hell is she going to contribute to my booking committee.

Clark: What kind of communication did you have with your bosses on the job you were doing?

Watts: They knew exactly what I thought at all times, they just didn't agree. But they don't tell you that, they go behind your back. The guys that I thought were doing their job, I got along with great. Dennis Brent, Tony Shrivane, I got along with them great. But you've got to understand it's a political game there. If they think you're in control, then they'd listen to you and do the things they're told to do. If they think you're not, they just nod and then they don't do a thing.

Clark: What was an average day at WCW like for you?

Watts: Generally, you'd start with meetings with your key department heads. The biggest thing you had there was producing television. It took precedent over everything because it's a television company. And we were producing so damn much with basically a minimum of expense for that type of thing. If you had compared our television production to the WWF's in budget and in equipment used and everything else, it would be like a Volkswagon compared to a Rolls Royce. Our production staff was overworked. A lot of the stuff that we had to do editing-wise, post production-wise, it had to be hired out because we just didn't have the capacity. It was just a constant grind, when you're doing that and the pay-per-views and the Clashes. You had so much production so you really spent a lot of time just trying to keep the television fed and keep up with the injuries and the talent and everything else. Actually, the house shows, which were already so disastrous, were the last and least important at WCW. Which basically is the way it should be with a television company and the potential of pay-per-view. You were dealing with the contracts, with all the legalities, and trying to work in through Turner Broadcasting legal to get the contracts done. It was generally a twelve to fifteen hour day of putting out fires.

Clark: It being a TV company, was it tough for you to produce that many hours of TV a week compared to when you only had one hour a week of TV with Mid South?

Watts: Your biggest thing is your quality control. We didn't have the time to look at every product as it was finished and as it aired. And the problem with WCW is so many people access the final product. If you were going to sit there and watch on the weekend all the products, you'd have to watch five to seven hours of product a weekend, you'd have been going crazy. What you thought was in the can is not necessarily what hit the screen. You had no control over the commercials that TBS

put in on the stuff on TBS. And so, often times you'd have a commercial that you had built into your end of the product and they had a commercial on their end of the product, and the commercials, even though pointing to the same event, may be totally different in context and structure. One time we were promoting the title change before it changed on the television. So you just never knew what the product finally was when it got on the air. You knew what you had shot and knew how it looked in your mind. We had to start critiquing. And we started critiquing the WCW Saturday show each week, and that's when it started really coming together. But, that was a big problem. We were just starting to address how to setup quality control for everything else. Generally, the syndicated show, you had different people assigned to watching it, but we were going to be having a more hands-on approach in the actual post production.

Clark: How were you going about critiquing the shows? Did you have people from outside of the company involved in that?

Watts: Yeah, Steve Beverly was starting to write a weekly critique. I was going to make him actually be contracted to do that. We were starting to make assignments. We were going to assign two wrestling people to each show. Say, like a Michael Hayes and another guy to a certain show, Jim Ross and somebody to a show, Tony Shavone and somebody to a show. Initially, Ole was trying to oversee them, and it just swamped him. They had no equipment up in the office where you could really sit and do a pre-post-edit where you take the raw footage and look at the time codes and pick out where you wanted to get in and get out of some stuff. That's the first thing we did with Ole and his office. With all that production going on, it was really on a shoe string type operation for a company that size. The other aspect was, you were always fighting TBS to try to get them to promo it. If they'd promo it a third as much as they promo the Hawks' basketball and the Braves' baseball and their movie packages, it'd be getting a better rating no matter what. Their logic was, "Well, it gets a good rating without it." And I said, "I just can't understand how supposed intelligent people can make a decision like that." Because if it's getting a good rating when you're comparing it with the overall TBS station ratings averages, and it's getting a good rating anyway, it could even do better with promoting. Why then would you not say, "Take the Braves which were hot and going to the World Series and quit promoting them because they were getting a good rating anyway?" "Well, we wouldn't do that." Their logic was so illogical. It was constant in every aspect. You were fighting inner-company situations that you could not control. That was the illogical and the arrogant ignorance that you combated on every level. Everybody had access to our product to stick stuff in or take stuff out that we had no control over. The quality control was the biggest problem with the television.

Clark: If you could turn back the clock, what might have you done differently while you were in there?

Watts: First of all, the people that hire you have to be confident that you know what you're doing. And they never believed in me at all and never believed in me philosophically. They don't understand the business. So from the time I was there, you had to justify everything you did. I have a lot more sympathy for the President of the United States after being through a corporate situation like Turner Broadcasting. Because Ted understands the value of wrestling. He knows what it did for his superstitions. But he's so insulated and wrestling's not the biggest thing on his plate. So you couldn't sit down with him. Because he's the only person that could have cut through all the corporate bullshit and say, "Hey boys, we are going to cooperate with WCW." Because WCW could have been a tremendous cash cow for Turner Broadcasting if we'd have gotten all phases of it properly aligned. But, you couldn't do it. The people that are pulling the strings don't understand it. It's unbelievable that they could have so little cooperation to be effective. Vince McMahon told me himself, he said, "My gosh, Bill, aren't you amazed? Turner Broadcasting should be dictating and running wrestling worldwide. If you could pull all the strings that were necessary, you could kick my butt, couldn't you." I said, "Yeah, we could kick your butt so easy. But, you're right. You're business is the wrestling business. They don't understand the wrestling business." So, the only person that's ever going to stop Vince is Vince himself. And he knows that, he knows the power of Turner Broadcasting.

Clark: Were you ever happy or comfortable in your position while you were working for WCW?

Watts: I always felt from the day I got there when I made the first couple of decisions about people that were department heads in WCW that I wanted to replace... Because they lectured, Bill Shaw and Bob Dhue would say, "We want a winning team here and if you're not going to be on the team, get out." And I'd say, "Here, this person is not on the team. They're against the team. We've got to get rid of them." Within the first three weeks you could see that wasn't going to happen. I knew then that the deck was stacked. But by then I had people committed and was bringing people in and had people excited because they knew that with me there - Dusty Rhodes, Ole Anderson, Jim Ross, Shavone, all those people knew with me there that I could pull this thing off. But I couldn't because they sandbag you. So, no, it was a very, very nervous, very frustrating, and a very paranoid time because they're like babies, they'd laugh in your face and shit in your hand. And it was

behind your back. And then the sheets are doing their tear down and the guys in the North Tower say, "Well, we don't read that." That's a crock of shit, not only do they read it, they supply information to it. So much of the information that was so classified in some ways that got out, had to be people in high positions getting it out. You're business was on the streets to be analysed, half the time before the event happens. I used to call WCW a "clusterf---". That was my whole description for TBS and WCW. It was a classic example of how to take a great industry, wrestling, and totally f---in' destroy it and make it a loser. When I got there the figure I was told by Bill Shaw, "Try to keep the losses this year below \$1.8 million." Even the controller in November was memoing upstairs, "Oh my gosh, Watts is going to take it over, we're going to lose over \$1.8 million." Shaw called a big meeting and he was going crazy about it. We came in at some \$421,000 (loss). Now, they had some CRT money. There was an awful lot of bookkeeping entries that helped not really paint the true picture of WCW. Even without the CRT money, we still came in below the \$1.8 million. But, I couldn't get a letter of commendation to everybody in WCW for the good job we did. All you ever got was the shit for what they didn't like. I take that back, we got good praise on one or two things. But, here's the most critical factor. And then when I was talking to him, he said, "Ted's upset because his figure is \$500,000 (loss)." That's when I said, "My God, there's no way then that I can't be made to look bad because if Ted's been told it's only going to lose \$500,000 - they've been telling me for the first six months not to lose over \$1.8 million - either way, I'm f---ed. When you realize that, pretty soon you realize what you are. You've been brought in there as the expendable person. They hoped that you would kick it in gear, and then they'd get rid of your ass. So, they have to start building their file on you for all the little bitty chicken shit things they can do to prove that you're not a good "corporate person," you don't dress like a corporate person, you don't talk like a corporate person, you don't suck up like a corporate person. It's like you're a loose cannon. Since they don't understand what you're doing and where you're going, all the little nitpicking shit outweighs the positives you've started doing. The positives - to stop the bleeding. We were going to make this company successful. We had to fight and regain control of the contracts and the exorbitant amounts of money that were just totally wasted there.

Clark: About two months before you resigned, were you getting more uneasy at that point?

Watts: I was totally disenchanted and wanted out. To tell you the truth, my contract didn't specify that I would have gotten my moving expenses and anything severance-wise paid if I resigned. Or else, I would have resigned sooner because I was totally disenchanted. I knew my nuts were being cut and they were trying to play the old game and cut your nuts one step at a time. The longer I was there the more frustrated and worse it was. I was just wanting out - hell, I didn't make any money as it was to go over there - but I didn't want to eat the moving costs, because my moving costs were \$20,000. You couldn't control Jesse Ventura, you couldn't control his contract, you had all these prima donnas with these huge contracts who got paid whether they worked or not. We were making headway. We were getting guys back out to the gym. Ole and Jody Hamilton were doing a hell of a job at the gym working out with the guys. But hell, the stars didn't have to go to the gym. "Why do I have to go? I get paid the same." I mean, you were really fighting the deal. It would have taken eighteen months to three years to really do it right. We were making the right headway and we were going the right direction. The television ratings were stabilizing and growing. The syndication, it was just unbelievable that they get \$600,000 in 1992 for syndicating our program and they lost 25% of our market. And the station list that they had was horrible. Our lead-ins were infomercials and you couldn't build a rating. They'd lay it off on, "Well, the ratings are down." "The ratings were down when I got there. Let's talk about what really happened to these stations." That \$600,000 was going to go to \$1.2 million in 1993 for TPS (Turner Programming Services) to do the syndication. Why the hell if you lost 25% of our network should you get your money doubled? We could not do one damn thing because nobody in TPS had to answer to us. They had a very smart man that they put in charge of TBS named Grumbls and we had a meeting with him. He said, "Man, I identify your problem, I've heard these horror stories. But I can't help you for eighteen months, I've got so much on my plate. You need to get your own syndicator." I was elated. That was in November. Then the old sandbagging. We couldn't get a quality guy in there because it wasn't in our budget. The sandbag was that we could not take that \$1.2 million out of TPS's budget next year. And I said, "What the hell are they doing to earn it?" We could build the best syndication in the business on probably 40% of that. A quality one. Because syndication in wrestling is simply building and maintaining relationships at the stations, which TPS was not doing. Those guys at TPS thought, in my opinion and everybody at WCW, that wrestling was beneath them. They didn't understand it. They thought all wrestling was the same, just like all Mexican food's the same, all Italian food's the same. They'd rather do *The Wonder Years*, CNN, and movie packages. Wrestling was not their cup of tea. We had no control. And it looked like we were going to get control but then here came the old joker in the deck, "Well, wait, you can't hire anybody that's any good because we don't have anybody to find them." And I'm saying, "Boys, you've got a \$12 million income stream that's attached to our syndication, and we're underdelivering." They're panicking about the underdelivery. Then you've got to fix it. No matter what, you have to fix it. And you've got to fix it with a good syndicator. I interviewed two guys and then they took me out of the loop. Then the

next thing I know, they hire a guy, in my personal opinion, that's not good for the job or the company. I found out he'd even been fired from WCW some time ago for embezzling. In my personal opinion, Rob Garner is a nice guy, but he's not a high-powered syndicator, he's not a high-powered closer. We couldn't get him out from behind his desk and on the road. That was another change I wanted to make, and I couldn't make it. By that time I was just still trying to do the things we needed to do for the television. But, I was losing heart. Pretty soon, the paranoia and the backstabbing finally get to you and you know all the personal problems that are in there that you're trying to deal with and overcome, and you can't. Hell, you've got more people against you than for you. I mean, it's simple, when you go into a deal and take it over, you've either got to have people for you or you get rid of them. You can't have people that are behind your back telling all the reasons why it's not going to work. I don't care who you are. I've often characterized this thing, that if a young Ted Turner were working in this company under the same hierarchy or the same chain of command I was, he'd get fired because they wouldn't understand him. They wouldn't know what made him unique. They wouldn't know that what he did was unique. They've actually said, "We're tired of hearing that wrestling is unique. It's no different than any other business. It's just like you're making widgets." Boy, when I heard that, I just said, "Well, there's no sense in me trying to bust my ass here because that's ridiculous." How come there was so few successful people year after year in pro wrestling, anyway? If it's so simplistic and all that needs to be done is dressed up in corporate clothes to be successful, everyone would be successful.

Clark: Do you think that because of that frustration and the paranoia that you were like a time bomb ready to explode?

Watts: Yeah, without a doubt. And it finally did, I finally blew my stack. Yeah, it got me, it finally got me. I was through, I was ready to go home.

Clark: Do you feel that might have caused a lot of the anger you showed when you were either in the dressing rooms or...

Watts: Oh, in the dressing room I've always been intense. The anger is overexaggerated. It's overblown. Mike Ditka was intense, and the media crucified him for it. Because the media is doing that now. But, Mike Ditka's intensity is what took the Chicago Bears to the Super Bowl. Lombardi was intense. Jimmy Johnson is so intense. Don Shula's intense. They don't handle their athletes with kid gloves. That's bullshit. When you're teaching athletes you're chewing ass. Go see Lou Holtz coach. They chew their asses out. You show me a guy that is not emotional and a guy that is not passionate, and you'll see a group of guys that don't give a shit either. So, that's been overblown. One of the things Shaw said, "We don't scream at David Justice, we scream at his agent. We don't scream at Deion Sanders, we scream at his agent. We want the athletes happy." How do you think it ever got so f—ed up? Corporations started buying these companies and didn't have the testicles to stand up to the athletes. Do you think the agent goes and screams at his client? Hell no. So, the guy that's causing the problem never gets addressed. Well, me, I'm a hands-on guy. And they told me, "Well, look at Ditka, that's what got him fired." That's not what got Ditka fired, the owner didn't like him. The same thing like my boss didn't like me, didn't believe in me. Guys like Ditka will be back in the game if he wants in the game because you can't find that many intense guys that will run and drive a team. It takes a lot of energy. So, my dressing room thing was chewing ass and correcting. But, it was positive. The kids that were growing and open-minded really loved it because nobody had ever told them what they did wrong, nobody ever gave a shit, and nobody ever knew. We all of a sudden had a system where we could take your tape right then and put it into a monitor and Ole Anderson started correcting you right then. We didn't have a lot of dressing room problems. It was overblown by the sheets, too. When I got there, Dusty Rhodes said in a year he had not had one single card that had everybody show up. Well, we cut the no-show rate and the late rate way, way down. Because brother, if you were late, I didn't give a damn what the excuse was, you got fined. If you no-showed, no matter what the excuse was, unless you were hospitalized, you got fined. Before that, they'd get fined and then they'd go up to the bosses and the bosses would give them their money back. So, there was no discipline. The inmates ran the asylum. I've been in every major territory in the United States as a wrestler, before I was a promoter, and I never saw the wrestlers happy. They always had something to bitch about. I've never seen athletes anywhere that were always happy, they were always bitching. That's the nature of the beast. You have to be dissatisfied to drive yourself and to go harder and harder and harder. So, that stuff is overblown by people that don't know shit from shinola about it. My dressing room demeanor, I wouldn't have changed that much at all. It was making headway. There was guys that really and truly appreciated it, and they'd tell me that on the side. Even some of the guys who were trying to raise hell in front of everybody, on the side were telling me how much they appreciated it.

Clark: With Mid South, just in the wrestling aspect, you always believed in an unpredictable and exciting style of wrestling. Was that hard to do at WCW because of all the different channels you had to go through before things could be carried out?

Watts: It was initially, number one. Number two, because of the ability of the athletes. The athletes have lost the ability to do their trade. Very few of them could

actually execute and carry out anything that was very difficult. Dusty told me, Ole told me, Mike Graham even one time came in and said, "My God, Bill, those guys can't do that." I said, "Anybody can do that." After it was over, he said, "Didn't I tell you?" I said, "You're right." It was very frustrating. So you had to go back to real basic things. We got the surprise and the unpredictability back in certain instances. We had a lot of major injuries. We lost The Steiners. We lost, due to personal problems, Gordy and Jake the Snake. I mean, you didn't have a lot of great leaders that could really execute things. That's why I was so excited about getting Ric Flair back. Because Flair, no matter what, has a tremendous personal pride in having the best match on the card. Whereas, a lot of the guys just sat out there, they didn't give a damn. When I started telling them they had to stay and watch the matches they all got mad. In the old days where you were competing for the top spot and your income was based upon what the company was drawing, you watched the main events so you could outdo them. And here's these pompous asses telling me, "Well, you know, we can't find a place in the buildings where we can really watch a match without the crowd hassling us." When we're not even drawing 25% of the building full, these prima donnas can't find a place to watch so they can learn and compete. When I was active in the business, when the buildings were selling out, I could always find a place to watch what my competition was doing because I was motivated. It's like Sting told me one time, "Well, Bill, the business has changed since you were out of wrestling." And I said, "You're right, we used to have to draw money." None of these guys have ever drawn any money. They all tell you how much money they've drawn but they haven't drawn any money. That's what TBS couldn't understand. I said, "If you clean house and get rid of all of them, we're not any worse off. We could start over, because nobody's drawing anything anyway." So at least we were going out and trying to give young guys a chance and trying to get some guys with some athletic background instead of some guy that had gotten his muscles out of a bottle and his attitude out of a chemical, that they thought looked neat so they made him a wrestler.

Clark: Was there control from TBS about what was shown on WCW's television, like violence or blood?

Watts: Not only that, but the leaks to the cable companies, the leaks to the sheets, and everything else. That's why I started limiting who was in my inner circle to three people, to try to shut down the leaks. When the sheets were getting our booking sheets, you could look at the deal at Halloween Havoc and realize that if Harley and Vader were going to show up when they weren't booked, you knew something was going to happen. It was just that the access to everything we did was so public that it was hard to have surprises for everybody. But we started getting a lot of unpredictability. We shocked some of the athletes. The thing as Jake Roberts returned in Baltimore, that was well done. Even the boys didn't know. When Vader beat Sting for the first time with the world's title, nobody knew. Bagwell, in one town where they had him go over Brian Pillman in about thirty seconds, he could not believe it. Neither could Brian Pillman. Pillman saw the reaction he got. Pillman is one of the kids that really developed an open mind and was really willing to try stuff, and it was exciting to watch him develop. Steve Austin was starting to get that way. And these were kids that we had problems with when we first went there because the guys would get these kids to carry the flag for shit that they wanted to stir up. They would influence these kids the wrong way because they don't know any better.

Clark: After dealing with Dusty Rhodes at WCW, did your opinion of him change at all?

Watts: The first thing I had to do when I got there was to see where Dusty's head was about me coming there, otherwise I'd have had to fire him that day. There was no problem, Dusty just wanted a job. Dusty's one of the most creative guys in wrestling, both as a wrestler and as a booker, and as a television mind, and a pay-per-view mind. Dusty's problem was, with all the stuff he had to produce, his follow-through was lacking. In other words, he would not maintain continuity. Continuity has always been his problem. And when you put him in a situation where you're producing so much more, continuity is even a bigger problem then. Dusty was just doing what was required of him. A lot of people don't understand, the booker is the visible guy, so he gets all the blame. But if Jim Herd walked in and said, "I want seven new guys next week because we've got seven new dolls," Dusty had to go get them. Dusty is a creative, creative guy. He loves this business. We were building a staff around him to stop the mistakes and to support the continuity. And with the people we were bringing into the booking meeting, we were getting the ideas, the ideas were starting to flow real good. We were out often times a year ahead on what we were going to do. And then you'd have a guy get injured or something, gets screwed up, and you'd have to revamp it. We weren't just booking day to day, we had plenty of plans. We had nine guys out from one period of time or another that were top guys in nine months. That's pretty hard to overcome.

Clark: From your position as a promoter, how tough is it to find real friends in the business that won't backstab you to further themselves?

Watts: That's always been in the wrestling business. That's in any business, unfortunately. Loyalty is an old-fashioned trait that is not really and truly respected

or believed in today. I don't have a problem with the guys I was working with as far as what they were doing. If Bill Shaw called Dusty up, he's going to cover Dusty. But basically speaking, Dusty gave me everything he had. Jim Ross gave me everything he had. If he got the chance he's going to put Jim Ross over. Ole Anderson begged me for a job, and I gave him the job. I'm disappointed in him because he went behind my back, and he knew what I was doing was the right thing, but he wanted the money more. And he saw he had an inside door. It probably wouldn't change what I was going to do because I was looking to get out of there anyway. I just don't like the way he did it or the fact that he hasn't returned my calls. I called him twice to congratulate him on taking my position, and he wouldn't return my call. Would I trust Ole again? No.

Clark: Are you upset that he was the man to take over your position?

Watts: No, somebody had to be there. I could care less, I was gone. I don't like the way he did it, behind my back. The last two weeks I was there I couldn't find him. When all of a sudden your television directors are making independent edit decisions, overruling you, you realize pretty quick that they've been told and they've seen no matter what that I couldn't control them either. That's the game Bill Shaw plays. He'd break the departments up and say, "I'll put this guy under this guy." That's the same thing with Bob Dhue. Bob Dhue is no longer in charge of everything up there. He's there to be sacrificed and mobbed, in my opinion, also at this point. So Shaw's always going to insulate himself. That's the corporate game.

Clark: How did being at WCW change or effect the relationship that you had built with Jim Ross over the years?

Watts: I don't think anything happened. I was overruled on Jim Ross, that's one of the reasons I quit. Bill Shaw took him off the air. That's to me the stupidist move they ever did. Jim Ross' 900 number was doing \$500,000 a year, and he was writing Missy Hyatt's number that did \$200,000 a year. And they haven't even touched that with anybody's production sense. They tried to get Flair to pick it up, but even Flair coming back couldn't pick up what Jim Ross' productivity was there. Jim Ross was one of the most productive guys there. Jim Ross was not only always well prepared as an announcer, he sat in on the booking, he helped maintain continuity. I mean, this kid is a complete kid. He was just all of a sudden axed. He was Vice President of Television. The next thing he knew, he was, as an after thought, told to report to Rob Garner, who he'd been trying to fire because he wouldn't go to work. Jim was f---ed. The way they play the corporate game, they still pay you your money while they're f---ing you. But then Jim just finally said, "Hey, I'd better see what my options are," because he recognized the handwriting on the wall, too. So he called Vince McMahon, and Vince McMahon said, "Boy, I'm glad to see you're free. You're damn right, come to me." Jim's called me three or four times. He called me during the whole process that he was going through. At times (my position in the company caused our friendship to suffer). At times I had to chew his ass when he'd screw up and get in a rut. But hell, I'd done that all his life in the business, anyway. At times there was strain, but Jim's really resourceful and doesn't stay down. That just motivates Jim. He'll go to work and come in with ten different new ideas. That doesn't keep Jim Ross down. Nothing's going to keep Jim Ross down. And I told Vince McMahon when I talked to him, I said, "You've really got a good man in Jim Ross." If Ted Turner woke up to what was happening and said, "Gee, we've got to get this straightened out," one of things for me to take a look at is the fact that I don't have Jim Ross. Because Jim and Dusty were the two most important people I had there.

Clark: In early February, about a week before your resignation, some of your power was diluted...

Watts: Oh yeah, but they'd been doing that all along, anyway. So then Bill Shaw came with his new chain of command, and I thought his new chain of command was fine. But I had already read the handwriting on the wall. I wasn't going to stay. What they're plans for me would have been, I don't know. With them you could probably stay there as long as you wanted to, as long as you kept your nose clean and said yes to the right people, you could collect your check. But I never went over there to find a job, I went over there to do a mission because I love the business. I think that's where everybody loses it. I didn't apply for this job, they called me, and I said, "No, I don't want to even come talk to those idiots over there until they've convinced me new people were involved that would give me autonomy." That's what I was promised. The first three weeks I was there I wrote a game plan on how to compete with Vince McMahon, and they rejected that. And then they rejected every department head change I wanted to make in WCW. All they wanted me to do was fire Dusty. And I didn't see any reason to fire him until you had somebody better than he was. I wanted to reach out and get everybody who had ability in wrestling and bring them in. I was putting most of my money in the booking department.

Clark: Was your resignation mostly your decision or was it mostly forced upon you because of the situation with Hank Aaron?

Watts: It wasn't forced on me at all. When Bill Shaw called me and Bob to come over and talk about the Hank Aaron deal, Bob Dhue and I were sitting in my office

and I was telling Bob I was leaving. And Bob was about to cry. Because even though he and I had had our problems, he realized that I had never lied to him and that I knew what I was doing. And he was really sad about it. But I said, "Bob, they're going to get you, and I'm going on. I don't want to sit around and watch it. And then Bill Shaw says, "What about the Hank Aaron deal?" I said, "Well, Bill, first of all, that's bullshit and you know it." And he said, "Yeah, I really know it, but it's kind of a corporate liability right now because of Hank's position with Marge Schott." I said, "Well, it isn't a corporate liability." He said, "Why?" I said, "Because I just told Bob I'm going on." And he said, "Well, are you sure that's what you want to do?" And I said, "Yeah, if you all take care of me." He said, "Well, what do you want?" I told him, and they gave it to me.

Clark: How did you feel when you found out that Mark Madden (*Pro Wrestling Torch* newsletter columnist and *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* sportswriter) had faxed the interview in question to Hank Aaron?

Watts: Oh, well, it's something that if you were trying to sit and figure out what some scumbag would do, then you could figure out that that's something a scumbag would do. My record in pro wrestling has never been racist towards blacks. I have been more pro-Black than any promoter/owner in the business. Mark Madden knows that as does everybody in the sheets. He thinks he's a power broker. I think, to tell you the truth, that Hank Aaron got way out on a limb on that whole situation and that that was a manipulation by TBS and for baseball. I tell you, in this country when you don't have the right to think what you want to think or say what you believe, you've got a lot of problems in this country. If you think TBS is not racist, you're naive, in my opinion. Do you think racial comments aren't made by TBS executives behind closed doors? The difference is that Marge Schott got brought to the front.

Clark: Do you feel Mark Madden basically did that out of spite?

Watts: What does he not do out of vindictiveness. I think he's a little bit intoxicated about himself. I think he thinks he's a lot more important than he is. Here's a guy that wouldn't have the balls to say anything like some of the things he said about Bruno Sammartino to his face. If he wasn't hiding behind the production of suing Sammartino, Sammartino would backhand him. To me Mark Madden, in my personal opinion, if he was in the men's bathroom he'd be singing "Stranger in Paradise." I mean, he's not what I call a real man. He's one of these people that hide behind this power of the press to slander and to viciously attack people. I have no personal respect for him at all. I don't even know the guy. I've read enough of his articles to see that he just writes whatever he thinks will get the reaction he wants, without any, any consideration of how truthful it is. I was asked about that article (that contained comments by Watts that were viewed by some as racial) when I was being interviewed to be at WCW. And Bill Shaw said that. That was part of his file that he had to build because Bill Shaw never believed in what I was doing. He didn't understand it. He thinks it's a wigdet business.

Clark: What have you been doing since you resigned?

Watts: I haven't been doing much of anything. I've been to the Grand Caymans with a couple of my kids to go diving. I've been enjoying my wife and family, and seeing friends in Tulsa. I'm just starting to get bored enough now to start looking at several projects, but I haven't picked out anything that I'm really going to devote all my time to.

Clark: Has anyone you worked with at WCW contacted you since you left there?

Watts: Yeah, but we better not say much about that because they'd get in trouble. They're scared. They are scared. It's almost like when you fall out of favor at TBS, you've got the plague. Guys, that if you scratched your ass, you're liable to scratch your eyes, all of a sudden you can't find them. The people that count that are still there are still my friends and still believe in what I was doing. Every decision I made there wasn't the best decision. You could always go back and probably do something a different way, but the overall direction we were going in was the best thing for wrestling and would have been the best thing for TBS. It would have given it stability. So, I don't lose any sleep over that. I am glad I experienced "corporate America" and the frustration. I think it gives me much more empathy for our President of the United States who goes in with probably a lot of things he thinks he can accomplish and then he finds that there's so many people with their own agendas and hidden agendas that are fighting him tooth and nail behind his back, that he can't really affect anything. I think that Ted has gotten so big that there's a lot of people with their own agendas up there that certainly aren't doing the things that are in the best interest of TBS. And that's without a doubt.

Clark: Do you feel that you might have a problem working for a boss?

Watts: I've never had a problem working for a boss. See, that's another one of those knocks. One of the most productive times of my life was with Eddie Graham. He was a pleasure to work under. I got along great with Roy Shires. I got along with Verne Gagne. He and I had great arguments, but I had a deep respect for him and he

had a deep respect for me. I knew he was boss, I still would argue and fight with him, and I think he appreciated it. He didn't want a "yes man." "Yes men" really don't add a lot to your life. I'm not saying I wouldn't work for somebody. I'm just saying I'm an entrepreneur. It's real frustrating to see what needs to be done, and you can't do it.

Clark: Are you a much more happier and calmer person now?

Watts: God, yeah. Everything I said to you, that WCW was like a nine month nightmare. That's what I told Bob Dhue, I said, "You know, Bob, the business that you're in has to be fun. And how much fun are we having? We haven't had any fun. Once or twice we'd go out and get drunk after a show or something, but basically it's just been a f---in' nose-to-the-wall grindstone with everybody shooting at your back. I had nine months of hell over there because I knew what I needed to do and couldn't do it.

Clark: What other business ventures are you involved in?

Watts: I've got a little nutrition business that I like and just some odds and ends. Omnitrition (nutrition company) is a really good company, it did \$125 million its third year. Our little distributorship, even in the nine months we didn't actively work, it has grown. I've given my wife the company, we started it together. She's making good money out of it. I'm proud of her. I don't know what I'm going to do yet. It's time where I'm getting bored, so we'll see.

Clark: Looking back on your reign at WCW, do you think it was a mistake ever going there?

Watts: Yeah, it probably was. I probably would have been a lot better off to have never gone, because I wouldn't have had nine months of that frustration. If I would have been given true autonomy, and I knew it would be a battle, it could have proven real good for the business and for TBS. But, that's neither here nor there. They've got their side of the story and I've got mine, and they're the ones that call the shots. But, a lot of those guys have been corporate guys all their life. They just become power brokers. But, I don't know if they've ever really done anything on their own. They're spending Ted's money.

Clark: Now that you're starting to look for things to do again, have you or would you think about starting up a territory again?

Watts: Oh, I don't think so right now. It's getting closer to a time you could with certain things, but it would be awfully expensive. I don't know. I got to thinking if there was somebody with a lot of money out there that wanted to do it and do it right, that I would probably consider running a small one. But I haven't delved into it that much. I've got another concept for wrestling, and I think if the time is really right for it... But, I wouldn't do it on my own. It takes somebody with a lot of vision to be a part of it with.

Clark: Do you want to discuss this new concept you have?

Watts: Not now. No. It would be very controversial, but it sure would be awesome.

Clark: This is just a hypothetical question to see where you stand with the wrestling business. If the WWF were to call you to come and work for them, and they gave you the things you wanted, would you?

Watts: Well, Vince McMahon and I are at opposite poles in many ways on our philosophy of the business. But, I've always had the greatest respect for him as a marketer and a positioner, and he's got the balls. I mean, he put his money where his mouth was and he went. He and I talked several times when I was still in business, and he told me when he almost went down the tubes, but he finally hit it and he made it. I've got nothing but a lot of respect for him and I think there is a certain respect on his part for me. He said that every time we've talked. He's reminded me how when he used to come in against me in the Mid South area how I used to kick his ass. He's never forgotten that. So, there is a mutual respect there. Now the next thing would be, what would he need me to do? And if there's something that he could decide that he needed me to do that was challenging to me, again, I have no problem in calling him boss. He knows he's boss. He's comfortable in that. I would be comfortable in that. At least one thing I would know is he knows wrestling. Wrestling is his business. I just don't know when his philosophy is so... It's not that far off, I guess. I just don't know. It would be interesting to explore. I thought there was only two guys in the world that could grasp my other idea for wrestling. I thought one would be Ted Turner, and I could never get Ted to sit down. And the other would be Vince. So, that would be interesting. Again, I don't know, I may be way off on a tangent, too. Everybody says that when you get a little older you become a dinosaur or something. I don't think I am. I think we proved with the emotion we developed in Baltimore, we proved with Halloween Havoc in marketing it, we proved several things there. That we were still on top of creativity and continuity and everything else. Our problem was getting the athletes to execute it. We could market it, we couldn't get them to execute up to the potential of what we

marketed it.

Clark: Have you watched any wrestling since you left WCW?

Watts: No. And I don't think that's important, either. Hell, it doesn't change that much. God, I wish it did. I didn't watch it when I was out of it. When you've done what I've done, if you sat and watched it, you would only get yourself frustrated because you'd be thinking how you would do it. And there's no sense in frustrating yourself. I don't go shop for cars unless I'm ready to buy a car. In other words, I don't go shop for clothes unless I want to buy clothes.

Clark: Yeah, but the wrestling business is a lot different from that...

Watts: It is, but it isn't. It depends on what level you've been in it. And the level I've been in it, you know, it was a business to me, and I loved the creativity. So, some of the creativity I loved, but it's not something I sit and spectate. (I don't plan on following it in the future) on a regular basis. I enjoyed renewing some old acquaintances and found out that a lot of people that I was not even close to in my career, it was nice to be around even them. I buried some old animosities. That part was good. Some of the people that hadn't changed, they'd give you their assurance and their word in one breath, and break it in the next.

Clark: In your personal opinion, what do you see in WCW's future under the direction of Ole Anderson?

Watts: Well, good golly, I don't see much of a future. I don't think he plays a very big part in it now. I think he's just a figurehead.

Clark: Do you see, because of the money that WCW loses each year for TBS, Turner dropping WCW or making adjustments in the future?

Watts: Well, I think that a lot of people on Turner's board do not want wrestling. I think that they're afraid to tell Ted. I think Ted understands wrestling and understands its value. I don't think anybody on his board really does. I think they pay lip service to him because they know it's one of his personal projects. I don't think that they truly support it. I don't think it's supported one iota. I think it's like a bastard child that they'd love to get rid of. Now, the only way that would happen is if Ted sells TBS. Then you might have who ever bought it spin off a lot of the companies. Who the hell would keep it? On it's present structure, and especially with the money they've enhanced people's contracts with since I've left. They went just about the opposite way again.

Clark: What contact, if any, did you have with Ted Turner?

Watts: I saw him three or four times and tried to get his attention, but couldn't. You've got to realize, the guy that I ultimately reported to was on the board. How do you go around him to Ted? I'd say, "Ted, I want to sit down with you, I've got an idea or two." He said, "Well, tell Bill (Shaw)." Well, what am I going to tell Bill? That would be like saying, "Gee, Bill, I've got to tell Ted about that you don't know what the hell you're doing." So, that certainly wasn't encouraged.

Clark: Just from your nine months at WCW, who do you feel will be future stars, or guys who you thought were great talent?

Watts: Vader's a good piece of talent. He has an injury problem, but he's definitely a good piece of talent. (pauses) It's hard for me to be objective right at this point. Just like my son being there, everybody's found out that, hey, he's not a bad kid after all. That's what I kept saying to everybody, "Why doesn't everybody quit worrying about him being my son and just judge him on his own merits." But, look at the strut and the insecurity to him. He doesn't know from one day or the next if he's not going to get stepped on just because somebody upstairs doesn't like me. So, I think that without a doubt he's got everything it takes to be a superstar of the future. Bagwell is great on the card, he's just too small. Attitude-wise, Pillman is great. There's a lot of good talent. Again, most of the talent is getting a little long on the tooth. And you're not building a team like in football to win a contest. You're building people that develop ratings and excitement, so you've got to change. You can't have the same stars over and over again. The biggest problem they've got to combat is staleness and the lack of turnover, and the fact that even if a guy's not with WCW, then if he's with WWF, he's still being exposed every week on TV. So, they've got a lot of problems. There was a lot of things I wanted to address about working with the independents and stuff to where you could have controlled some of that. But, again, it's not going to be done. That's the reason I was starting to work with Cornette's group. I think Jim Cornette is a talented and creative guy.

Clark: Where do you see his organization going in the future?

Watts: I see it being a struggle. I think that's what Jimmy wants to do. It will struggle along. I don't know if it will ever get big. The problem you've always got is you've got two tiger sharks sitting there that could kill you off anytime they want. I don't think Vince would do it intentionally anymore. I think he realizes he doesn't

need to do that. But, I'm not sure that that has ever sunk in to WCW. When they see someone, it's just, "How can we get his talent?" Well, good gosh, what would you do with it if you had it? That's like them going to The (Man Formerly Known as the) Ultimate Warrior. Why in the hell would anybody want to touch him with a ten foot pole? If he's drug-free he's going to be a shrimp. He's proved that he's been totally trained in his entire career to walk out on wrestling promotions, to be an emotional problem, and to be a person whose word's no good as far as living up to his business commitments. Well, if that's his track record, why would you want to mess with a guy like that? WCW knows his track record. They've got to have somebody that's got the balls to tell them. And that is what they don't have. Because when you've got the balls to tell them, you're not dressing and talking and acting like a corporate person. Therefore, you're at risk. The thing to do there is be as unobtrusive as possible. That's why Dusty gets all the flack, because he's the booker. That's visible.

Clark: Looking down the road, maybe five to ten years in the future, where do you see wrestling at or in what state do you see it in?

Watts: I'd hate to predict it. It's always survived. I don't know how. To me the things that I think are the biggest problems are the staleness and the lack of mystery. There's no mystery about wrestling anymore. They've taken the mystery out of it. There's no sport in it. It's been so exposed that there's no belief. I think that in order to create danger and excitement, there has to be mystery. There has to be danger. There has to be excitement. There has to be somebody taking a chance. It's all just choreographed. Unless they do some serious, serious restructuring, which takes time, (the downtrending of wrestling will continue). And most of them don't have the vision to follow through on a game plan for a protracted period of time. They all want to have something that turns it around in three to six months, and it's not going to do it. And there's not going to be another Hulk Hogan. There will be somebody else at some point, but it's going to be harder to break him out of the pack. The WWF's top stars, look how old they're getting.

Clark: About a year ago, you said about promoting, that, "You can also go through trends in your own mind when you get intoxicated with yourself, and you lose and forget what you've got there." Did that ever happen with you while you were with WCW?

Watts: No, not at WCW. It happened to me a lot younger in life. No, I wasn't intoxicated with myself at WCW. I knew I was expendable and I knew that they weren't going to let me do it. I was emotionally elated initially because of what I was going to try to attempt to do and I had worked out the plans to do it. But when I'd see some little jerk just say, "You can't do this. We can't do this," give you all the reasons why you couldn't do it, I knew that I was just passing through, hoping to be a little effective a little more before I left. But, I wasn't intoxicated with myself. I've always been the same way as far as my personality, how I treated people there. I'm brusk, I'm opinionated, I'm arrogant, whatever anybody wants to say. But, that's the way I've always been. So, I didn't change. Hell no.

Clark: Could you tell me about your children and your family?

Watts: No, let's keep my family out of this. Like Erik says, every time I open my mouth he gets in trouble. My family's doing alright - my kids by my previous marriage and by my current marriage. I've got no complaints. I'm proud of all of them. Any of them don't have to do anything to impress me. I want them to be happy. I want them first of all to be happy with themselves. Every kid is not a world-beater. They don't have to go out and set a record or anything else to be my kid. If they're happy in life, that's enough for me. It's the same thing with me, they just have to accept me as Dad. It all goes with me, my good points and my bad points, it's all one package. They're comfortable with me, I'm comfortable with them. If they're not comfortable with me, they don't have to be around me. The proof of the pudding is that I just got back from spending time with them. Erik and I were close in Atlanta. We enjoyed that. I think Erik is a very creative, intelligent kid. I think he's very frustrated, as any intelligent, creative person would be, in a situation like that. But, that's a good, healthy sign. If he was happy and complacent there, I'd worry about him. I'd think maybe he's succumbed to becoming an inmate.

Clark: Do you think he was in a very tough situation while you were there, as he was wrestling under your reign as WCW Vice President?

Watts: Hell yes, because of all the jealousy and everything else. But, he was handling it great. Erik handled it fine. The people around him didn't, but he did great. Dusty and Ole and everybody else, they saw his talent. I kept trying to hold him back more, and Dusty and them wanted to go harder with him. I said, "No, you can't right now. It just politically won't be accepted."

Clark: Did you want the same success you had in wrestling for Erik?

Watts: I think that I just want him to be happy with himself. I would rather see him eclipse anything. If my kids wanted to go in the direction I wanted to go, I'd hope they'd all be better. I think that's how they learn. In other words, my children have to pick up my good points and work those things in, but they also had to fight my bad

points, and not pick up those traits. If they pick up my bad points and those become their strong points, there in for a hell of a rough life. I think the kids that have studied somebody can generally go further than that person, if they're so motivated. I think Erik will be a successful businessman. I think he's just in his neophyte stage. When you come out of college, you've just finally come out into the real world. It's quite a shock for the first two or three years. Because in college, you damn sure aren't in the real world. So, Erik is just not experienced. He just got married, he's got a new business, and everything else. He's got a lot to learn yet, a hell of a lot.

Clark: You've said before that one of your best concepts when you were promoting Mid South was that you took yourself out of the ring and pushed other stars. Some people would say that you broke that policy by pushing your son, Erik, in...

Watts: I think that's so f---in' stupid. First of all, again, as I have said many times, that if you were to go out and get somebody for wrestling, what are you going to go get? Some asshole that got his body out of a bottle and is on drugs, that's in front of a mirror in gym, and can't walk and chew gum at the same time. One of the guys we had under a guaranteed contract, Dusty keeps trying to do something with him over there, I've seen the guy walk down the apron and fall off the apron. My son, Erik, has a wrestling background, an athletic background, and an educational background. I watched Dory Funk Jr, and I watched Terry Funk, and I've watched different guys in wrestling, and they were pushed if their dad was in the business. Some of them lived up and exceeded it, and some of them didn't. But, it was a damn good gamble because they have grown up in the business. Greg Valentine was a great hand in his day. Dory Jr. was a great, great hand. Terry Funk was a great hand. Mike Graham was small but he certainly was a good hand. You could just go down the list of the guys. Barry Windham, when he's motivated and challenged, can do anything. Vince McMahon, what if his dad hadn't made him a promoter? We'd probably all still be in the business! (laughs) Seriously, Donald Trump, what if his father hadn't brought him into the construction business? I think it's small people just trying again to make much-to-do about nothing. Erik, if I had been doing Mid South, I'd have pushed Erik because he is a sincere kid. A lot of the top hands at WCW told me, not only when I was there but after I left, that Erik was further ahead than some guys that have been in the business for two or three years. We didn't push Erik as much as people think we pushed him. We shot one angle with him, and that was him and Arn Anderson. And it was Arn's idea. It was Arn Anderson's idea. That's the only thing we did. We tried to do a deal with him and Rude, but Rude has a little bit different concept of himself than I do. When I saw Rude's true value, in my opinion, it was the match he had with Chono in Philadelphia. It changed my opinion of Rick Rude.

Clark: From your knowledge and your experiences in the wrestling business, would you rather see Erik in a different field?

Watts: Well, yeah. I would rather see him in a different field because he may or may not be so frustrated. But again, I don't try to talk my kids out of their own dreams. They have to experience it themselves. So when they have a dream, I try to support them. Then they have a chance of making it or not making it. But otherwise, what if I talk them out of it? They'll always hold that against me. So, I just support them and love them. That's what I've always done. Erik wanted to be a quarterback. I never thought he should be a quarterback. He could have played any position, but he wanted to be a quarterback. So, I supported him being a quarterback, and he was a quarterback. He was a third string quarterback in his junior year of eligibility and his senior year he was the number two quarterback. In the first game, the number one guy got his leg broken. And he led the team for the rest of the year. No matter what, Erik became the starter. And Erik threw on national TV for over 300 yards against Ohio State.

Clark: How would you respond to the argument that Erik was unfairly given a push upon his arrival in WCW, when he hadn't wrestled anywhere else before?

Watts: Where would you start somebody? Did Don Shula have his kid go play little league football somewhere, or did he start him with the Miami Dolphins? Did DeBartolo have his kid get experience with the 49ers or not? So, that argument is so stupid. If you were going to make sure your kid was in a system where you thought the basics were going to be properly learned, you'd start him in the system that you had the most control of. Just like every other promoter started their own son in this business. They didn't send him to some place else to get started. The next thing is, where the f--- could you send him in this business where he could make a living? What are you going to do? Bring your kid into the business and then try to kill him off? He doesn't have a great contract by WCW standards, that's for damn sure. So the bottom line, that's another argument that is so bullshit. Where's he going to get more work, at WCW or some outlaw promotion or some independent promotion that runs twice a week? If you had your own son who you thought had ability, what would you do, would you try to put him in the best environment or the worst? Don't you recall at the time I was also starting developmental towns for all our young talent, which I fought like hell to get at WCW. Johnny B. Badd had his first twenty minute match in one of them. He was amazed. The kids love those developmental towns. They got to work and got to learn their trade. The deal to teaching a wrestler how to wrestle, it's just like when I took "Dr. Death," who was a legitimate four time

all-American in amateur wrestling. I booked him where he was booked seven nights a week. He wrestled every day. That's what you don't have today. So, where do you learn your trade? You've got a bunch of guys that go out and they'd go short matches or they'd do the same old routines over and over and over again in our business, where it's predictable. If you've seen one of these routine workers' matches, you've seen them all. They do the same highspots, the same false finishes. Then they think they're great workers. I think that that is a biased accusation. It doesn't have any merit whatsoever. I wanted independents because once you've got a guy broken in and past the basics, you could send him out for six months to a year of seasoning, and that's what made the business strong. You can't do that anymore. Because a guy can't go to Jerry Jarrett and make \$25 a night or you can't go to Texas where everybody gets in free and you don't even know if you're going to work one night a week. Where in the hell do you send a kid that's serious about learning his trade?

Clark: What are your personal feelings about the Von Erich family tragedy and what it all means?

Watts: The Von Erich situation is a very, very tragic family situation. Probably one of the greatest tragedies ever in our business. It's not for me to criticize it because, God almighty, that could happen to anybody. None of them were forced into wrestling. Now, whether or not they believed or thought that they could live up to what the others did, if you're talking about Mike, but Mike wasn't forced to go into wrestling. The bottom line is, when you take your own life, it's your decision, isn't it? So, everybody wants to put that blame on something else. But, you just really can't do that. The Von Erich situation is just one of those horrible, horrible tragedies. I think the biggest problem is that, as a family, they never could come to grasp with the fact that all those kids were drug addicts. I mean, every one of them. And it's the worst thing I've ever seen happen. Everybody tries to make so much out of that instead of the fact that it was just a horrible tragedy. I know Jack and I know Doris, and it's horrible. I knew those kids since they were young kids. Three of them became big stars in the business.

Clark: But, like in Kerry's case, his success came really quick and then it kind of dwindled off as he got...

Watts: It dwindled off because he became a drug addict. But, name me a sport that it doesn't dwindle off if you become such a complete addict. Kerry's success, the wrestling era was hot, the Dallas territory was hot, they had a lot of great talent, and Kerry became the biggest star of all of them as far as box office. He was the third kid in line so they were waiting for him, and he had that certain charisma. That's like Erik says, when you say, "You need to pay your dues in the business." Has Sting ever put the ring up and down? Has Sting ever sold t-shirts at the business? Has Sting ever had to act as a security guard at the business? Has he sold tickets at the business? Has he had to clean up the dressing rooms? And certainly, has he ever had to go stretch anybody? Well then, what is paying your dues? Because you took steroids and you luckily got in a fabulous position to get probably one of the best guaranteed contracts in the business? And I'm not knocking Sting. I really like him, I truly do. But, let's talk about putting your dues in. Where the hell did he do all these dues? Erik has put the ring up and down. He's sold t-shirts. He's been a security guard. He's worked the doors. He's sold tickets. My kids had to go work at the matches because I believed in them earning something.

Clark: Do you think there's any correlation at all between some of the other fathers who pushed their sons and the Von Erichs, or do you just feel it's a tragedy in itself that can't be compared to anything like that?

Watts: Well, again, I was there when Dory Funk Jr. was breaking in and I was there when Terry broke in. Dory got pushed much stronger than I pushed my own son, and so did Terry. It worked because they became great performers in this business. I'm sure their daddy would turn over in his grave when, in the heyday of the wrestling business, he died, and it (his promotion) was left with them, and in less than a year they lost it. But, their ability in the ring was great. Kerry had an ability in the ring. Kerry's drawback in the ring was the drugs. David had a great charisma and ability in the ring. David was the kid that had the greatest feel for it. Kevin was a great athlete. All three of those kids were great athletes. Mike Graham got pushed. But, Mike also paid his dues. He did it all. Greg Gagne, I know Verne, when you broke in under Verne, you paid a price. I was there when Barry Windham's dad broke in under Verne. He put the ring up and down. When you broke in for Verne Gagne, you had to do it all. You paid the price. You wanted to be in the business. Nothing was given to you. Verne broke them in right. That's what WCW needs to go back to. Instead of buying guys into the business, they need to make guys pay the price to get in. That's what they do in Japan.

Clark: But, you never thought about the Von Erich situation when you were pushing your son, Erik?

Watts: Shut no, because I never pushed Erik like the Von Erichs. The Von Erichs were never beaten. My kid got beat by every top hand that he went against, right on TV. My kid didn't beat any top hand, except Arn Anderson when he was finishing up on his contract. But, we were setting up an angle. Bobby Eaton had been beaten by

everybody and was never a big single person, anyway. So it didn't hurt Bobby Eaton anymore than where he was already at, to be beat. So who the hell did Erik beat that was so great? He beat a bunch of job guys. When Dory Funk Jr. was first in the business, he went Broadway with the world's champions, which was unheard of back in the days of the NWA, but especially for a kid in his first year in the business. I shot an angle in a town one time and he came in and beat Ted DiBiase's dad after I shot the angle with him, in the same night. I don't think you can sit there and correlate them (the Von Erich deaths) all. Every one of them is a separate set of circumstances. And who the shit gives a shit, anyway? If you could produce life down to a checklist of do's and don'ts, it would be so simple, wouldn't it? But, there's no way you can do that. Again, Erik certainly had the background and the ability and the charisma and the smarts. He's a damn good investment. If I was doing it all over, I'd probably get him a better contract than he's got. He had it hard. He had to be at the gym every day. He still goes every day on out to the gym to workout. Plus, he had all the guys on his ass that were just a bunch of jealous pricks.

Clark: Did the Bill Watts that everybody knew change at all in the five years that you were out of the business?

Watts: F--- No. I'm probably more mello than I used to be. I'm still a passionate, hard-driven person. If I love to do something, I work at it hard and I put my energy in it. But, no, I didn't change. It was just that I was under more scrutiny because whatever you're doing today in the business, you're scrutinized by everybody. It's like doing it in a fishbowl, where everybody is taking a side over everything you do.

Clark: When you were coming into WCW, because of all of your past accomplishments and your reputation and success in the business, I think everyone like wrestlers, fans, and everyone else was very excited and enthusiastic about you being able to turn things around...

Watts: Yeah, so was I, until I got over there and found out what all I had inherited. And it was impossible to restructure it because they weren't going to let you.

Clark: But, from talking to a lot of those people, from what happened with the situation, those people were kind of disappointed with...

Watts: I'm just saying, unless they could walk in my shoes, they don't know what I went through. But, without a doubt, I understand the wrestling business and I know the wrestling business. And had I been given the autonomy I was promised, I could have done a hell of a lot more. But it'd been downtrending for three and a half years. Nobody's going to turn it around overnight. Actually, that's just at WCW. It had been downtrending since about '86, except for one promoter. Crockett, from '86 on down, was downtrending, was going broke.

Clark: Those people were also saying that if anyone could turn the business around, it was Bill Watts.

Watts: Well, I could. Without a doubt, I could. But, you can't do it if your hands are tied behind you. I'll tell you what, you're an eighteen year old kid, and if we were in a streetfight with my hands tied behind me and you had a baseball bat, you're going to beat my head in. That's exactly the same thing in "corporate America." Without a doubt, I could have done the job. I was doing the job, in spite of them. But, I had no support.

Clark: But, because of what happened at WCW, do you think that your reputation in the wrestling business has been damaged?

Watts: Well, I'm sure it has, to some people. The people that don't know what the f--- they're talking about, anyway. My reputation hasn't been damaged with anybody that I care about. And I know what I did or didn't do. Basically speaking, they had to damage my reputation to make me expendable. They could damage anybody's reputation they want. In a real, seemingly, wonderful way. That's the corporate way. They're like babies, they laugh in your face and shit in your hand.

INTERVIEW MARK MADDEN

The following interview with Mark Madden that was published in issue #22 was conducted via telephone from his Pittsburgh Post-Gazette office in Pittsburgh, PA on February 12, 1993.

Clark: What had prompted you to fax the interview to Hank Aaron?

Madden: Basically, when Hank Aaron shook hands with Bill Watts at the Clash of the Champions on national cable TV, I was very much intrigued because Hank Aaron obviously is a man who stands for racial equality, while Bill Watts, by his track record- such as the interview in *Pro Wrestling Torch* in 1991- stands for anything but. So, my first reaction, frankly, was that Hank Aaron was some kind of a hypocrite. And I wanted to investigate that possibility. The thing that brought it to my attention again was when Hank Aaron spoke out about the leniency of Major

League Baseball on suspending Marge Schott (owner of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team) for only a year. And then sort of a light came on in my head that maybe Hank Aaron just doesn't know Bill Watts. So I called Hank and I spoke with him and I faxed him the article. To be honest, initially, my thought was that maybe the article might expose Hank Aaron. I think it's sort of naive on my part- as much as I've seen the fruits of Bill Watts' labors- as it turned out, Bill Watts was the bad guy here and Hank Aaron turned out to be a very good guy. I'm sure a lot of people think I went into this with the intention of ruining Bill's career. I didn't get Bill Watts- Bill Watts got Bill Watts. If Bill Watts had been living in the twentieth century, moralistically speaking, and if he had talked sensibly to Wade Keller in 1991, none of this would have happened. Believe me, I don't have enough time in my workday to think about Watts that much. Basically, my intention was to try to get a pretty good story. I've got to be honest with you, had nothing happened to Bill, it would have been a better story, if you know what I'm saying. I tried to sell my story to *The Atlanta Constitution*- being of course the mercenary that I am- and I called them Wednesday evening. I was told by their editor, 'Well, we have somebody right on it. The minute anything happens there, we'll have someone right there.' I said, 'Yeah, was anybody there today at noon.' They said, 'No, but we still don't want to buy the story.' So I have no idea what they're doing. It might interest you to know as well, last night in the dead of night, I received two threatening phone calls- one at 1am and one at 3:30am. I did not tape them, which I probably should have, but one was a man who claimed he lost his job because Bill got fired, saying that I was forcing his wife and kids to starve. It's the most absurd thing ever because to my knowledge, Bill losing his job has cost no one else to lose theirs. Then, I got a call at 3:30 in the morning saying, 'Nigger lover, you'll wish you never heard of Bill Watts.' And frankly, I had wished I had never heard of Bill Watts long before that phone call.

Clark: Do you think that Bill Watts had anything to do with those calls?

Madden: No, I don't. I think there's maybe just some misguided people who maybe don't like me to begin with because of the sheets, or just people that I know maybe doing a work on me. Hey, it could be serious, but I definitely don't blame Bill for that. I think Bill Watts, contrary to popular belief, has a lot more to do than think about me as well.

Clark: When you look back on it, are you happy about what you did and what happened because of it?

Madden: No, I don't think real journalists afford themselves the luxury of being happy over something that. My job and my intention was to get a story and I can't help the backlash because of the story. Now if you ask me if I'm glad that someone who clearly had racist and bigoted views was called to tasks on them, yes, definitely I'm always glad when that happens, whether I am apart of it or not. For anyone to blame me, is ludicrous. This thing was sitting out there for two years. Anyone could have done this. In fact, frankly, I'm amazed no one else did. But, I did it with the desire to get a good story, which obviously I did. In no way shape or form did I want to get Bill Watts fired. However, am I upset that it happened? No, not at all.

INTERVIEW TERRY GORDY

The following interview with Terry Gordy that was published in issue #22 was conducted via telephone from his home near Chattanooga, Tennessee on February 2, 1993.

Clark: How do you view the business today? Both in the states and over in Japan?

Gordy: Well, I'll just tell you, it's a completely different business. I came from the old school and what they're doing here in the United States is probably the biggest expose there is. Where I work at now, which I'm glad to be working there- maybe for some people the money is not as good, but in other cases it is. Working my job in Japan now, it would be hard to work everyday, everyday, everyday. There would just be no way you could go out and wrestle every night because we have to regroup, recuperate. The way the business is in the United States- I'm knocking anybody, there's a lot of great talent out there, don't get me wrong- but, it's more like a business in Japan. In Japan, I'll work for a month and then I'm home for a month. I only work fifteen weeks a year and the rest of the time I can be home.

Clark: I guess you could say that wrestling is viewed on a lot more serious level over in Japan than here in the states...

Gordy: There's no doubt about that. Because you've got people's sons and then their sons that's running the business here. It's not doing the business any good.

Clark: You were working for Japan for awhile and then you came back to the states on a part-time basis working with WCW. And you'd go back and forth between the two. Was there noticeable differences in the attitudes of the wrestlers over in Japan and the wrestlers here in the states?

Gordy: Oh yeah. There's more harmony over there. Everybody takes part in selling out just about everywhere over there. And there's only one boss. It's hard to do business here because you've got so many egos and then you've got- I know people, I ain't going to mention any names, though- people picking up big money that probably never paid any dues. But, there's no doubt about it, if you work in Japan, you're going to pay your dues.

Clark: Did you see a difference in the motivation of the wrestlers over there and over here?

Gordy: I'd say so.

Clark: What is it you think that motivates the wrestlers over in Japan differently than the wrestlers over here?

Gordy: I guess working over there is like working for the highest, top pro team. Over here, it's more like a bunch of high school kids, from the way I got it.

Clark: Do you think that the only motivation over here is for a paycheck and the work isn't as important?

Gordy: Yeah, that's it. Especially the ones that are on big guarantees. It doesn't matter to them whether the houses are good or bad, they know what they're going to get at the end of the year. Over in Japan, you're working to keep your job. Sometimes you have to fight for your job over there.

Clark: Did you have a hard time working with WCW because you might have been around a lot of people that may have had a different work attitude than you?

Gordy: Yeah. It would be kind of like some of those guys coming over to Japan, and Japan already has got their top guys, and then they're wanting to fit in too. It's a lot different.

Clark: What were the main reasons you were working for WCW?

Gordy: Well, I'll tell you the honest to God truth. I worked for them and I worked for them for the money, and they paid me good money. Like I said before, you've got all these egos in there now and some big strong boys that think that they know the business, and they really don't. As far as in the United States, they feel like they don't need to have to learn. And you try to sit down and explain something to the people that don't really know that much about working, and then they don't understand that because they've been on top in this situation, in the United States situation. It makes it really hard. A lot of times when Jim Herd gave these guys breaks and put them on top, a lot of them didn't even work.

Clark: Well, when Bill Watts came in, he brought in a different type of system with contracts. Did you agree with his ideas of contracts where they were based on incentive?

Gordy: Yeah, in a way. I don't think he should take it away from them and leave them out in the cold or anything. But, there was a lot of guys that shouldn't make the money that they were making. Believe me, I'm a Bill Watts fan, and I hated that it had to happen that way, but it did.

Clark: Did you become frustrated while working for WCW about the way things were going here in the states?

Gordy: Oh yeah, real frustrated. And everybody else was too I was just trying to get a start, and it was real frustrating.

Clark: Do you think that it's fair of everybody to blame all the problems in WCW on Bill Watts considering the condition of the business right now here in the states?

Gordy: No, I don't think it's right to blame it on Bill Watts. In one part I do, because he's hiring people that still don't know their ass from a hole in the ground. I can see from just what I hear that he's out to hire anybody now. And believe me, I like Bill Watts and I always said to myself, 'If anybody could turn this business around, it would be him.'

Clark: What do you think happened there? Do you think maybe it's not Bill Watts, that the business right now may not be able to turn itself around? Or do you think that WCW just can't turn itself around?

Gordy: No, I don't think they can turn around. It just goes to show any person on a guarantee- I'm talking about Sting, Rick Rude, they're about the only ones left- it hurts everybody else knowing that he's getting \$750,000 a year and a lot of the other guys are starving. I don't think that's right. But, I guess that's the way it's got to be. Hey, don't get me wrong, if I had a chance to get \$750,000 a year, I would probably quit what I'm doing right now and work for them.

Clark: If you were a promoter in the current situation that the United States wrestling business is in, what would be some of the changes you would make?

Gordy: If I was the promoter, I would slow everything down- they are trying to push everything down people's throats and even the off-the-wall angles. Personally, I think they need to go out and have some middle level talent and give them a few wins on TV. Then, you could get them to get over your job guys. That would be my philosophy- to try to build everybody, if you've got a bunch of guys built and then when somebody does beat somebody, then they've beaten somebody.

Clark: How would you handle the contracts? Would you go with the incentive type or would you do something like a guarantee?

Gordy: I would go with the contracts he (Watts) has got now- except for a few now- \$500 a night or \$1,000 a night is a good payoff. Like I said, there's no better person than Bill Watts in the business. But of course, maybe he's lost it. I don't know, maybe he just lost his touch. But, the deal that he gave them- medium guys pick up \$500 a night and top guys pick up \$1,000 a night- that's good money.

Clark: Is that one of the main reasons why you left WCW? Because of the type of contract you were under?

Gordy: No. One of the main reasons I left is because I just hated to give up a whole bunch of money which they hold two weeks behind. Then, I would have a falling out with them and then I wouldn't get that money. So, every time I came back from Japan, the paychecks would be due and he would have a chance of messing with my money. I figured it would be the time to get out because that way he doesn't have any of my money and I don't owe him nothing. He's trying to hold Doc's (Steve Williams) money back now- that he owes him- because he quit. Our deal was that we'll work a hundred days in a year and we're supposed to pick up our money for a hundred days. And I quit, and Doc was trying to hang in there because he wanted to get his money.

Clark: So, if you had finished the year out with WCW and completed the hundred dates, you would have gotten all that money that they held back?

Gordy: I should have gotten the money if I had finished it.

Clark: So, the money they hold back is kind of like a safeguard for them in case a wrestler doesn't fulfill his obligations. If a wrestler quits then, he has breached his contract and then that means they don't get that money that was being held back for them, if they had completed all their obligations in their contract. Is that sort of right?

Gordy: Yeah, that's right. They feel I breached my contract because I didn't show up for the Philadelphia show (Havoc '92). I just made the decision- well, do I go and do the show and then have a chance of them wanting me to do something stupid- so I just figured that it would be best for me to end it right there, because they didn't owe me any money and I didn't owe them any money.

Clark: Was there also any family affairs that effected your decision to quit and not go to Philadelphia that day?

Gordy: No doubt about that. It was too much pressure. I've been doing full-time in Japan for the last three years and I just couldn't see going back to work for WCW and then Bill saying, 'Well, I don't care, you missed my Havoc in Philadelphia, I'm going to hold this much out.' I feel like if I ever went back for them, that they'll have to pay me night by night.

Clark: Do you think that one of the problems with wrestling now is that they're constantly trying to rehash things that were once successful, like the Freebirds?

Gordy: Yeah. And the other problem is that they try to find new talent that don't know what they're doing. They know that these guys need jobs. It's like they say, 'Alright, this guy needs a job, so let's give him a job.' And then they pay these guys as little as possible.

Clark: What do you see for the future of wrestling in the U.S.?

Gordy: I don't see too much of a future because I think they've insulted the people's intelligence too much. And there's just not as many people tuned in. They've got so much of it on TV. I just don't see a big turn-around anytime soon. I think it has been overexposed. People realize that they don't have to go out and buy tickets. And wrestling hasn't given them anything to go out and buy their tickets because they can sit at home and watch everything on TV.

INTERVIEW HONKY TONK MAN

The following interview that was published in issue #24 with The Honky Tonk Man (Wayne Farris) was conducted via telephone from his home near Memphis,

Tennessee on March 14, 1993.

Clark: What made you decide to go on John Arezzi's radio show and bring up the whole subject of the Justice Department investigation of the WWF and Titan Sports, and what part you had in it?

Honky: Simply because I hadn't been reading too much about that particular investigation that has been going on. It's like it has been a hush-hush deal by all the writers and all the media people, for some unknown reason. It's quite obvious that it is going on and that it is taking place. Myself personally, I was subpoenaed there. I didn't go there on my own free will. I was subpoenaed by the government to go. But yet none of the wrestling newsletters or anything seem to be giving it any coverage at all. They seem to be giving all the coverage to the fact that Titan Sports and the WWF have got so many lawsuits against other people. Lawsuits against Geraldo's show, Nailz, David Shults, Rita Chatterton. But, nothing about the fact that they are being investigated by a federal agency. And that just seemed odd to me. And then to have two wrestlers that they had on Arezzi's show that night sitting there... Terry Funk, being as diplomatic as he possibly could and always will be, not wanting to step on anybody's toes or say anything wrong, I guess. When you get to a point in your career where Funk is, at his age, what do you have to lose by coming out? I mean, step up to the plate and be a man. Say what is on your mind. I felt like the Mexican performer (Konnor) was saying what he felt and how he felt about the way he had been treated in various organizations. But, nobody seemed to want to touch the other thing (investigation) at all. I hadn't been reading anything in any of the newsletters about it. So, I had a chance to get on the line and I just said what I felt needed to be said. And as long as you tell the truth, you've got nothing to worry about. And everything was the truth.

Clark: Do you have anything against Vince McMahon? Has he caused you any personal or financial harm?

Honky: Harmed financially? Well, sure. I haven't received all of my royalty payments from the merchandising. We're still in the process of trying to discover what should be paid to me; what I hadn't been paid for, how much I should be paid for it, all those things. You're harmed financially when you're not paid for something that's due to you. As for wrestling, in the last year or so, there hasn't been any wrestling harm financially because everybody knows that now the wrestlers are free and independent agents and able to go and work wherever they want to and when they want to. And even Titan themselves now let their wrestlers go work elsewhere now.

Clark: Do you think one of the reasons why this particular subject- the investigation of the WWF and Titan Sports- is not being covered or isn't being widely talked about is because of the power Vince McMahon and the WWF has in the wrestling business?

Honky: Yeah, I'm sure. I guess it's easy for a guy to be scared off or be afraid of litigation. I live by the fact that the truth is the truth- there's no in between- and if you believe in what you feel and you believe that you are right, then you pursue. And a lot of people, although they do have the beliefs, they won't pursue it because they might be afraid. They're afraid of someone like Titan, who can afford very expensive lawyers and can litigate things, and the fact that they go after someone after Geraldo. I mean, when you say, "Well, he's suing Geraldo." Well, that scares a lot of little people away. When it comes to smaller shows or television shows that are not as powerful as Geraldo, and they see that there's a lawsuit... "He's suing the New York newspaper." Well, all your smaller publications aren't going to dare do anything because they just can't even afford to defend themselves period. I mean, anybody can sue anybody. The point is, whether it ever goes to court. You know, the end result. It is a scare tactic. It's a normal legal tactic. There's nothing wrong with it.

Clark: Do you think they are going very deep into this investigation?

Honky: They ask a lot of serious questions and a lot of questions- some I could answer and some I couldn't. I would venture to say so (going deep into the investigation). I wouldn't think the government would spend the kind of money that they're spending on this if they didn't feel like they were going to go from top to bottom. I mean, they're just not playing around with one or two people, it's a very in-depth investigation.

Clark: What do you personally hope will come out of all this?

Honky: Personally, I would have hoped that they would have gotten to the bottom of the royalty payments and the things that are owed to me. But obviously, I don't think that's part of the investigation, that I know of! I hope that they'll just get this business cleaned up a little bit now and get it back on track and to have it treated like any other sports business. Not so much secrecy and not so much behind the scenes going on. A little bit more open and honest as far as the wrestlers and how they're used and how they're treated and things of that nature.

Clark: Do you think that all these scandals in wrestling and the lawsuits and the

investigations are hurting the business a lot?

Honky: I don't know that it is. I've always believed any publicity is good publicity, no matter what kind it is. I don't know that you could say that something would be bad. Wrestling is just a business that was never reported on or never even brought to the attention of the national media sources until a few years ago. The worse someone is or the more it's reported on or the more bad deeds that are reported on- especially in the entertainment business- the more the people are intrigued by it and want to go watch it. I don't think that the scandals and the investigation could hurt the wrestling at all. I think it's just the way the wrestling business has been handled as far as the way they've presented their product to the public- as far as the way they've used their talent and their angles and things like that is what has hurt the business.

Clark: Where do you see the business going from here?

Honky: To me, I think it's the normal up and down that happens in every business, if you take a long look at it. It will bounce back again. When? Who knows? I don't think anybody ever expected it to go as big and be as big of a phenomena as it was in the 80s. Will it bounce back for the 90s? It's possible. It might be another ten years or twenty years before it ever rebounds. But, it's like a cycle. I can remember with boxing when you couldn't give a boxing match away. And then all of a sudden, it took off. And now boxing is back down on a low spot again. Wrestling goes the same way.

Clark: Are you against the WWF at all and could that be one of the reasons why you're exposing the investigation and what's been going on?

Honky: No, I didn't really decide to speak up about anything. I was subpoenaed into my part of all that. Because I really didn't have anything to say about it. It's just something that I didn't have any comments on. I was concerned about these millions of dollars of the merchandise that's being sold on a nationwide basis, and me not being compensated for it.

Clark: What do you think will be the outcome out of all this?

Honky: I really don't know. It wouldn't be right for me to speculate on what I think the outcome would be because I have absolutely no idea of what the target of their investigation is, or anything about it. Anytime you go in front of a jury- that's what it was, it was a Grand Jury- it can be 50/50. Anytime you walk into the courtroom, you can either be guilty or not guilty. It wouldn't be right for me to speculate because I haven't heard all the testimony.

Clark: What do you see for your future in wrestling?

Honky: I'll just keep doing the independent thing. I'll only work as much as I want to work, when I want to work, where I want to. That's what's important to me. I'm able to spend a lot of time at home or as much time at home as I want to and able to work as much as I want to. I don't need a whole lot. I'm not driven by that greed and envy or having all those worldly possessions. I'm not driven by having to have all those things. So it puts me in a different financial situation. I'm able to live a very comfortable life and do the things I want to do and be happy, and that's what's most important. I'll probably get back into the school system and start coaching and teaching again, being involved with young people and being involved with everyday activities with people. Cause I enjoy that. I'm either teaching or entertaining. It's really all the same. I won't crawl in a hole somewhere and die. I mean, a lot of people feel when they're not in the WWF or they're not in the wrestling business that they have no life. When all this is over, when I'm not even involved in wrestling anymore, I want to look back on it just like the jobs I had when I was in high school or when I was in college and say that was something I used to do. When you look back and say, "Oh yeah, that's something I used to do." Heck, I used to drive a truck, I used to pump gas, and I used to cut people's lawns. That's something I used to do. And wrestling will fall in that same category- that's something I used to do.

Clark: Has your life changed in a big way since leaving the WWF?

Honky: It's still the same. Nothing changed for me because I knew that going in... I wasn't some young rookie coming into this business when I went there. I had my eleven or twelve years in this business and I understood what I had to do and what needed to be done. Because this is a business, and I treat it that way. It's a business for me. It's a business for the promoters. It's a business for the vendors. It's a business. And I treat it that way. I have people on payroll that have to be paid. I've got accountants and lawyers, and I've got an agent, and I've got a secretary that has to be paid, and bookkeepers. You have to treat it like a business, and I knew that going in. I had my head on straight when I was in the WWF. No matter what, it boils down to a check coming in on a weekly basis. The end result is not what you make or how you make it, it's what you save. (People are only in the business to make money) Hopefully, that's why they should be there or they shouldn't be in it. If you're in it for something other than money, then it can get to be a hassle because it is a costly business even to stay in. It costs you money to be in any business, I don't care what it is. There's x amount of dollars you have to put into it. If the guy has no

brains about finances at all and he totally doesn't care about the money, if he's a young single guy and just wants to have fun and spend it all, wrestling and any form of entertainment or sports is a great business. But there comes a time when you can't just say, "Hey, this is great." It's time that you look towards the future. We have no protection. There's no compensation when it's all over other than what you have saved or what you invested. You've got to watch what you're doing. Financially, you've really got to be on your toes about what you're doing because you can end up being physically busted and also financially, too. It can happen in football, baseball, in Hollywood, it can happen anywhere.

INTERVIEW KERRY VON ERICH

The following interview that was published in issue #8 and again in #24 with Kerry Von Erich (Addisison) was conducted via telephone from his home in Dallas, Texas in late July, 1992.

Clark: I was wondering how you first got started in wrestling and what kind of an influence your father had on it.

Addisison: My father was a great, great wrestler. And like all little kids, boys want to be like their fathers- especially if they're successful. My father was really successful. He was one of the greatest promoters in the history of this sport. My brother Kevin came in first. Then, my brother David. And then, I came in. Then, Mike came in. Then, Chris came in. But, I came in because of my father and his success in the business and owning the promotion here in Dallas. That was probably the promotion that pioneered all of wrestling. If it wasn't for my father, the WWF would have never come along, or WCW or anything else. And we firmly believe in that.

Clark: Your father probably trained you, but did you receive training from anybody else?

Addisison: Yeah my dad trained me in fighting. A great, great Greco-Roman wrestler from Iran named Khosrow Vaziri- who went into the WWF as The Iron Sheik- he's one of the greatest amateur wrestlers ever in our business. He helped me out a lot and I used to wrestle amateur with him when I used to fight amateur through high school as well as through Texas and all over the United States as a young kid. I started wrestling in elementary school. I was seven years old when I first started wrestling. I also played football at Lake Dallas High School and the University of Houston. In high school, I was an All-American in football and went on to college and was an All-American in track & field, and set the world record in track & field in college. I set the world record in high school track & field eleven different times- but that was all in the discus. In 1980, they boycotted the Olympics and I stepped out of college and right into pro wrestling.

Clark: Was your father's promotion just about your favorite group to ever work for?

Addisison: Yeah, but I got say that I appreciated the WWF. I appreciate the charisma that they've added to our sport. I don't appreciate some of the showmanship that they've added to it. But as far as the charisma and the gasoline they've put in it to fuel our sport, I do appreciate that.

Clark: Turning back the clock to around February of this year, you had disappeared for the scene for a while. Could you discuss with us what happened to you?

Addisison: Well, I stepped out because I went to Betty Ford. I just got locked up in pain killers and drugs. It came a time where I realized if I kept on doing drugs to keep on kicking ass and taking bumps in the ring, that it was going to finally kill me. When you start doing drugs, you get lost in them. I wasn't doing drugs to party. I was doing drugs to keep myself going, keep myself well, keep injuries down, and to keep myself in the gym. I know so many people that I know are in them that are in our business. I'm one of the few, one of the very few that got help. Maybe one out of a thousand of us have stopped and got help. Whenever there's a lot of injuries involved, whenever there's a lot of heartache with death and family, you try to escape a lot, you try to medicate those feelings. You just find out you're going down a one-way street. I speak a lot now all over the United States and all over the world to kids on leadership, goals, Jesus Christ, drugs, friends, family, and everything else. But, I would not know about the problems with drugs if I didn't deal with drugs. I would not know all the problems with death if I didn't deal with death. I would not know the problems in family without dealing with family problems. Those are all a gift from God, although they're a very misconceptionized gift, they are a gift because I did learn from them. And anything you learn from is a gift. (After my motorcycle accident) That's whenever I started getting access to a lot of pain killers and stuff. But, it was way before then. The death of David just almost killed me. I almost blew my f_ in head off when David died. In fact, I would have been happy to. My brother Kevin felt the same way. My brother David was our whole world. He was one of the brothers. Then, my brother Mike killed himself, and that ended my world again. Then, my brother Chris... who idolized me in everything I did. He always wanted to

be like me, He always told me, "Kerry, man, you got everything. How come, why do you have everything?" I used to tell Chris, "You've got things that I want, too. Like the ability to laugh at things, and your ability to draw, and the ability you have with your hands, and to love- just your ability to love alone is something I value and wish I had. But, he always wanted my athletic ability. But, I don't care who you are, what you are, or what you think you are, the grass is always greener over someone else's fence. It's always greener somewhere else. These baseball players are making a million bucks, and I'm making a million also. We're both making a million, but then again, he's playing baseball. I wonder what baseball is like. And so, you want to try something else, you want to do something else. That's the way my brother Chris was to me. Really, that's the way all the brothers are. I mean, I envy Kevin's values as far as his quickness in the ring. His love for children, I envy that. I envy David's ability for his love that he gave other people and his love for the state of Texas. Mike, I envy his ideas, his sense of humor, his strength, his willpower- I envy that. But, it's not something I would take from them. But, it's something that when they died, I took out of them and tried to put into myself. Anytime I took the world championship, my brothers were never, "Oh no, Kerry got it again." They were never that way, they were on my side. They never said, "Hey Kerry, slow down, back off the pace a little bit and give Kevin, David, Mike a chance to get into the limelight." It was, "Hey man, go for it." Whoever is in the press is who's doing the time. I just did a lot more at the time than they did.

Clark: What was actually happening to you mentally when you got arrested?

Adkisson: It was all out of depression. It was all out of being out of control. Thank God it happened because if it didn't, I'd be dead. I really would. Thank God for Betty Ford and for so many other things that pulled me out of the drug world. Vince McMahon was the one who helped me go to Betty Ford. He straightened me out in that way. And so, that's why I can't sit here and say, "Yeah, they're a bunch of ripoffs, bunch of thieves, a terrible show." Cause I'll never say that against them.

Clark: Then, what was really good of them- after they got you the help- was they brought you back in...

Adkisson: Oh, sure they did. Vince has totally supported me in that. I don't have a problem with that. I just had a problem with... I'm an idealistic kind of person when it comes to my business, and my business is keep people believing. I don't believe in telling five, six, seven year old kids that there's no Santa Claus. I don't believe in going out and telling people that our business is not for real. I believe that our business is something that we've all fought our guts out for, and we'll die for it. My dad has given his total help to this business. Gene Kiniski, Joe Blanchard, Johnny Valentine, Buddy Rogers- these guys have made our business for real, have given their total lives for it. I'll be damned if I'm going to be one of them who lays down and says are lives aren't worth s___ and that this is just how it is. I'll tell you what, money is the key motivation in our business until you sit back and look at the values. I'm second generation. My father was a fighter. I live because of this business. I survive because of this business. People who just come walking in off the street and say, "I want to be a wrestler" and become a wrestler, and because they're big and goofy looking, Vince makes them a big, big star. And they never paid their dues. They never went through it as a kid, being beat up in school because some kid says your dad is a fake. I mean, I had to kick his ass, and I got my ass kicked over and over again. So, we learned to care and respect and do anything we can to keep this business alive. I got my ass kicked too many times because I was trying to make other people believe. I will, on my deathbed, swear that this business is real. Just remember, WWF is sports entertainment. But, it's time to go back to the old school and protecting our business and working our ass off in the ring and doing whatever it takes to take our business back to the top. And put on the skills, the motivation, the desire, the love, and the needs that this business has got to have in order for it to survive forever. If you want it to go ten years, then the WWF is it. But, if you want to make it go forever, WWF isn't it.

Clark: You seem to now have all of your priorities and your values in order. Did the Betty Ford clinic help you see these things?

Adkisson: These values were already there. But values that I lost because of being in drugs. I've always had these values. It's just that drugs take away a lot of values, a lot of pride people have inside. It's painful and very sad to see, but that's just the way it is. Here's a stat for you, out of everybody that has ever gotten into drugs, only 5% ever have gotten out. Drugs make you a liar, a cheater, a thief, and everything else. My marriage stayed strong through the whole thing. What broke us up was trials and the deaths of brothers over and over again. It's losing the sight of values, things like that.

Clark: How did you feel about being on the road as much as you were when you were with the WWF?

Adkisson: When I'm on the road, I'm very much to myself. I go from the airport to the hotel. I eat, I go to the gym and train, and then I go back to my hotel room and I just cool out before the fight.

Clark: How did your family react when they found out about the problems that you were going through?

Adkisson: They were supportive. They were ready to see me get off drugs. They knew that it was a one-way street to nowhere. Everybody thought that I would be the next one (of the Von Erich brothers) to die. The big news story hit my mom and dad here and they called them while I was out of the country and said that I hung myself. My mom and dad really flipped out. My brother Kevin heard it, too. And Kevin believed it and my mom and dad believed it totally. In fact, my dad went to one ranch and my mom went to the other ranch. And all my dad's Christian friends gathered around my father and stayed by his side- them thinking that I had committed suicide. Then, I came back into the country and I called my father. And I'll never forget the sound of his voice. One of his friends answered the phone and his friend said, "Jack, it's Kerry." My dad's first sound of his voice was, "Nooo!" He said, "Son, son, son, are you okay?" He couldn't believe it. He didn't have words. It was like someone's son coming back to life. You've got to remember, I had so many brothers commit suicide that all of a sudden, when we hear that stuff- we believe it first and then we don't believe it second, cause you don't get that second chance. It was really something. But, it was on all the news here in Texas and all the radio programs that I had killed myself. Until I got back into the country and they saw that I was alive... All the channels- channel 8, channel 4, and channel 5, everybody retracted that I killed myself. It was on all the radio stations and everything.

Clark: That is one thing that I've noticed- that your hometown and around the Dallas area is really behind you and your family. That was quite evident at the funeral of your brother David because the whole Dallas area was in shock and filled with sadness.

Adkisson: When my brother David died, the funeral was bigger than the Kennedy funeral. The police department- helicopters and the motorcycles- they stopped all the traffic on the highway going to David's grave sight. It was incredible. It was a great, great feeling. There was a lot of people who felt like they lost a brother. You've got to remember, my brothers and I competed in high school and college, and everything we did was put on TV. Every time I scored a high school touchdown, it was on the news. They used to call my football team... not Lake Dallas Football Team, they called it Adkisson & Company in the newspaper. That made me feel good. It showed me that my state was behind me.

don't get me wrong, but we've got a big disagreement right now and I was treated very unfairly. The other way I look at it is, I'm not going to make myself miserable thinking about what somebody has done to me, because in time, all that stuff comes back around. What goes around, comes around, and whether he knows it or not, somewhere down the line, he'll have to pay the price for the things he's done to everyone. And unfortunately, he can't afford that.

INTERVIEW TULLY BLANCHARD

The following is part one of an interview with Tully Blanchard that was conducted via telephone from his home near Charlotte, North Carolina on August 21. Blanchard, who left wrestling in 1989, works at his local church and coaches a football team.

John Clark: Are you upset at WCW for the way they handled the fact that you weren't coming in, as they were advertising you to be there on the very weekend of the pay-per-view (Slamboree '93)?

Tully Blanchard: Am I upset with them? Not really. I mean, I would expect it. I think that there's probably some wrestling fans that are upset. But I'm not really. I'm a little annoyed, I guess would be the fact, because I sent them a letter a month in advance and they knew I wasn't going to be there. And then to just lead fans on... I guess the way they presented it makes me look bad, but it's a past life and God closed the doors for it to happen, and there's not much else to say about it. I don't dwell on it.

Clark: When you look back on the situation now and the condition WCW is currently in, are you happy that you decided not to return?

Blanchard: The Scriptures teach you that the devil will come at you as an angel of light. I was not considering going back to wrestling just for the wrestling sake. I was going back because I thought it would be a way to reach more people with the cause of Jesus Christ. And that was through hours of prayer and things, and I continued to pray that if this was not God's will for my life, to slam door shut. And he did slam the door shut because I had gotten a little bit in error. Yes, I was saying all those things and yes, I would have done all those things because I know the experience that I have gone through since November 13, 1989, is a real experience, that God has made himself real to me and I could do nothing that God did not approve of, but still I was wanting to change my financial bracket. The offer that Ole Anderson made me was ludicrous. (laughs) It was just horrifying. If I did not know Jesus and

my life had not changed, I would have been insulted. But I wasn't and so they go on and Paul Roma is a nice guy and he's got a great body. They're doing the best they can. And I'm doing the best I can.

Clark: How do you personally feel about Paul Roma taking your place as part of The Four Horseman?

Blanchard: Personally, The Four Horseman are Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, Tully Blanchard, and whoever else we wanted to talk about. That's who it always was. That was the nucleus. And Ole was not part of the nucleus. He was one of the original because when we first started doing it, Ole and Arn were tag team partners and Flair and I were the singles, back in '86. And then Arn and I became tag team partners when they fired Ole. But the nucleus '86, '87, '88, was Flair, Blanchard, and Anderson. They proved when Arn and I left the WWF and he went back that two (Arn and Flair) of the three couldn't make it work. I mean, I'm just describing. I'm not criticizing or judging anybody but I'm stating a fact, because it didn't draw money. When Arn and I left, Flair was by himself, and WCW's revenues dropped. One person could not make it float. So you needed all three. The chemistry was all three. Then if you slide Luger or Windham or whoever else we slid in as the fourth person, it didn't make any difference. Or if we didn't have a fourth person and just used J.J. Dillon, it worked—big revenues, many people in many buildings. So if you don't have the three original ingredients, it's not going to work. Paul Roma is not Tully Blanchard. He's a good guy. I know him, worked out with him in the gym when we traveled with the WWF, but he is not Tully Blanchard. I was unique in the ring, as Flair is unique, as Terry Funk is unique, as Dory Funk Jr is unique. Roddy Piper was unique. Wahoo McDaniel, unique. Harley Race. People might consider that egotistical for me to put myself in a group of people like that. But these are people that went any place they ever went and made money and were main event-caliber people. I say main event-caliber because not everybody that's stuck in the last match is a main event-caliber person. Not everybody that's been in main events is box office. Dusty Rhodes, unique, tremendous box office wrestling talent. And whatever he lacked in the ring performance wise he made up for it with charisma and drawing ability. Ivan Koloff, unique. Arn Anderson, unique. Ole Anderson & Gene Anderson years ago with the Minnesota Wrecking Crew. Again, I can go on and on. But there is a tremendous amount of effort and time that it takes to become a true star in that business because there's a lot of intangibles. It's not like football where you could just say, "Hey, run over five people and make a tackle," or, "Make everybody miss you and run down the field." Wrestling is not like that. There is some intangibles. The charisma, being able to have a persona of yourself, get that across to people, and get them stirred up, and leave their homes and come to these buildings. And from what I understand, these buildings across this country for both companies are not very full. So consequently if you look at the fruit there, buildings not being full, then people are not doing their jobs on the television. So there again I say, Paul Roma is not Tully Blanchard.

Clark: Are you upset at WCW at all for taking such a legendary, established part of wrestling (The Four Horseman) and trying to make it work again by putting together what they could? And do you think they have decreased the tremendous value the Four Horseman had?

Blanchard: It doesn't decrease the value of the whole thing because it's like gold and fool's gold. I mean, the trained eye knows the difference. You could be flattered because they're trying to re-achieve what was once there. I can remember telling J.J. Dillon when I left the ring in Philadelphia the last night that Arn and I wrestled for the WCW, "This is the end of an era." And I stepped through the ropes and went down the aisle. I didn't know that I would never go back, but Arn eventually did and I was supposed to. I was a lot more irritated with them three and a half years ago when they didn't honor their verbal agreement with me for three quarters of a million dollars over three years. That was much more irritating, but I've gotten over that too. Paul says in Phillipians, "Let the past be the past, and go on." You can't change it. There's no amount of griping, no amount of moaning, there's no amount of being on your pity-pot, anything that you can do to go back and change what they did. Or what I did. So you just learn from it and go on, and that's what I've done. There's nothing else really to say about that. I've just gone on.

Clark: After going through some hard times and then cleaning up your life and finding Jesus Christ, and coming to a point in your life where you are happy, do you think you would have been able to control temptations to get caught up in that type of lifestyle once again if you had returned to the professional wrestling business?

Blanchard: If I would have went right back, I don't think so. I don't know. I cleaned up my act the night I asked Jesus into my heart. I quit drinking, quit running around with women, quit doing drugs, quit everything. I could have probably been lured back a little bit, tempted back a little bit, but that all depends on how much seeking you do of God. Paul says that when you first get saved, you're an infant, you eat as an infant would eat. But as you get older, you eat as a man would eat. Certainly—and I'm not being egotistical—the enemy would have come at me and made it very difficult, and if I would not have lived, ate, and breathed God's word, I would have fallen. If I would have been back in that business, I would not have eaten, drank, and slept God's word, get it inside me, get it into my heart, like I did

because I was stuck at home for almost a year unemployed, had lost everything. And the only thing I had was God's word, and so that brought peace to me. So I studied it and got it in me. Certainly not to the degree that I needed in me, even today. Yes, I probably would have fallen. So God closed those doors and shut those doors for me not to go back. And that's the way I prayed too. I prayed, "If this is not your will, Lord, for me to go back—because they had called and asked a number of times." Jim Herd offered me, golly, two, three, or four contracts in there over the course of the next year. And their final one was, they offered me a thousand dollars a day and only wanted me to wrestle a hundred times. And I turned that down. That's when they hired Steamboat back. It was very, very difficult to turn that money down when you're having financial problems, and it took a lot of fasting and praying for me to really seek God's will and for God to speak to me. And I don't mean that I heard an audible voice, but he just impresses your spirit that it almost sounds like an audible voice at times. But you just know that this is what God is telling you to do, and so God is taking care of any vengeance that needs to be taken out on either company for what they've done to me or said about me, God is taking of them. The Bible says that no weapon formed against you shall prosper. It's God talking about his people. If privately or openly they have set out to defame me, God's taking care of it. I don't have to do nothing. If you look at their businesses and their ratings on television have dropped and the loss of TV stations, the trouble that Vince McMahon's going through, it's pretty strong. The Bible also says, "Do not harm my anointed." God called me. The Bible says in John Chapter 15, Jesus said, "I chose you. You did not choose me." So when God chose me and I surrendered to his calling and wooing and drawing me to him, he called me for a purpose. So I'm one of God's anointed. And you can't just run around and persecute and treat bad and do bad and malicious things to God's anointed without it coming back on you. People might think I'm silly but I think the fruit of that is pretty strong on both parts.

Clark: We were talking about why you would return to wrestling, and you talked about the monetary reasons and also to spread the word of Jesus Christ to more people. Because of that, what conditions had to be met as far as the character that you would portray?

Blanchard: It never got that far. They offered me a minute amount of money on a per-event basis. (laughs) It was too silly. (laughs) It really was. (laughs) I couldn't have eaten. And then you're right back in the same situation, without any insurances or anything like that. It was absolutely ludicrous. I would have had to wrestle 365 days a year to make what I made the last year in wrestling. It was almost like they were, "Okay, we've got this guy that was All-American in college, but we don't know he's going to be anything in the pros." But yet they paid everybody else on what their past record was. Well, I take that back. They paid most of the guys on potential, on what they think they could do, and they were paying exorbitant amounts of money to people that can't put anybody in a building or get them to turn their TV on. And then they wanted to offer me a very minute amount of money like I was just coming off street saying, "Hey, I've got a guitar and I can sing a song. Listen to me. You can make a star out of me." And that's not where I'm at. They might say that I'm being presumptuous, but I've walked down 100 many aisles and too many sold out buildings. And yes, I was not the only person there in the main event. But if you look at every main event from '85 through '88 for Jim Crockett Promotions, my name was right up there at the top. Every card that Arn and I were on for the WWF that made money, we were right there at the top. So that's where I'm drawing my basis on. You can probably answer the question where I fit into all that stuff better than I could, but I just had to chuckle at the amount of money they offered me.

Clark: But were there specific guidelines that you had in your mind about the character that you would portray?

Blanchard: The only thing they asked me not to do was preach in the dressing room. And I said I wouldn't.

Clark: But would you have portrayed a heel character or something of that sort because of the message of God you're trying to send?

Blanchard: Well, from what I understood, they were trying to make the Horseman not that anyway. And not doing a very good job of it. I hadn't gotten to that bridge with WCW yet. I knew what I had in my mind, but I had not discussed that with them. My meeting with them was mostly a listening situation, although they did ask me a few ideas. I voiced my opinion for about an hour. And then it was over with.

Clark: But because of the experiences you've had in your life over the last couple years and your devotion to the Lord, would you have become a heel or a Ric Flair type character—living life in the fast lane?

Blanchard: I'm not sure that irritates people anymore. In 1984 that got people aggravated. With the condition of our country, in 1984 people were envious of people that got on TV and talked about having the most money, having the most girls, having the most this, having the most that. With the way AIDS is, the way promiscuity is, to get on television and talk about being the most promiscuous man, whether you are or not, is that what you would call a heat-getter? Does that make

the man envious of you and want to watch you get beat up? Does that make a woman drool anymore? No. I would not have been with that. I would have had to change certain things. I would have made the same very argument that I'm making with you right now to them. And I would not have been a part of that simply because I love my wife, God has blessed us with two children—two miracle children because the doctor said she could not get pregnant—they're two very healthy, beautiful children, and if they would see Daddy on television, I'd have a hard time even though I used to do it when I had no children. But how proud could my family be of me getting on television talking about being the most promiscuous man in America and then walking home and hugging your kids? So I would not have been a part of that type of situation and I would have had to voice my opinion. And I think that I probably would have prevailed because what they're doing isn't working. You don't fix something that isn't broke. So if they're doing sellout business in Philadelphia, if they're doing sellout business in Atlanta, Charlotte, and all over the country like we used to be doing—you can talk about the hardness of society and the toughness of it, but the people still have money. They're still spending it on a lot of things. They're just not spending it on wrestling. And they're not watching it on television either or you would be doing more business in those things. So evidently whatever they're doing is not right.

Clark: How much do you think the wrestling product affects kids and their values?

Blanchard: Whether you get caught up in the values or not, if you just allow yourself to see it... We watch how many television shows in this country? I think they say before a child is age ten he will have viewed 70,000 murders from cartoons to shows. How many cars blow up? At what point does the human mind subconsciously, without even making a conscious decision this is not real, do you get numb to the fact? That people are getting killed all around us on the city streets. That they've had 400-some murders in Charlotte, North Carolina. That our nation's capital is the number one murder city in our country. That rape happens so often they don't even report it anymore. That AIDS is so rampant that they don't even talk about the increase in venereal disease that makes people loose their minds and causes them to be sterile. We're numb to these things. We're numb to the fact that you can go hit somebody with a chair and not split their brain open. So at what point do these children get affected with it? You look at our society. That's the correlation—look at our society. You tell me where this make believe killing and stuff on television leaks into our society. So yes, children whether they get caught up in it or don't get caught up in it, it affects.

Clark: What do you think it is about this business that pulls a lot of these guys into the drug and alcohol catches?

Blanchard: Well, I wasn't as bad as a lot of people think. I never came to work drunk. I had done drugs before I worked some. But I never missed work because of anything like that. It is the life you perceive a star to be because of this seemingly power that you have over, say women, and the omnipotent-like way you're treated by some people. And unfortunately, many people start believing their own press clippings, and they start perceiving themselves as a star. When in fact, as Vince has proven in many, many cases, Vince has made stars out of nothing. So everyone of them is just a pre-fabricated made up, blown up balloon. And very few of them were able to stand on their substance. Some of those people I talked to before, they survived all the politics, they survived all the pushes and people trying to pull them down, and their performance kept them up because the fan appreciated their performance, their hard work, and the substance was there so they could not be toppled.

INTERVIEW EDDIE GILBERT

The following interview with Thomas Edward Gilbert Jr., 32, was conducted in Philadelphia, PA on September 24, six days after he said farewell to Eastern Championship Wrestling's hardcore fans, and three days before he moved back to his hometown of Lexington, KY. Now, he reflects upon his career both in the ring and behind a desk, his recent deal with Tod Gordon's ECW, and his future in and out of wrestling.

John Clark: I was first going to ask you, what were your goals when you entered the wrestling business, and have you achieved those goals?

Eddie Gilbert: Yes. I had a lot of goals set for myself growing up in the Memphis area. One of my first goals I ever had was wrestling Jerry Lawler in the main event in Memphis because he was the top guy. A lot of people don't realize this and understand it, but in 1974 when the Southern junior heavyweight championship belt changed to the Southern heavyweight championship belt, it was actually the same title My dad had won a tournament in Birmingham, Alabama for the vacant title. Len Rossi had always been the champion for years and years down there, and he got his ankle broken. And then my dad won a tournament and he held it for five or six months in 1974. Back in those days Tennessee was like three different territories—the Memphis end, the Nashville end that included Birmingham, and the Knoxville end. They brought him up to Memphis to work some stuff and he got to

work a program with Lou Thesz. I'll never forget the night that he pinned Lou Thesz. Thesz then beat him for the belt and held it two weeks. Then my dad won the belt back, and I will never forget the frenzy in the Coliseum, people standing up and you couldn't even hear your own self. I was like, "Wow, my dad beat Lou Thesz." Then a couple months later, Jerry Lawler with manager Sam Bass won the Southern junior heavyweight title from my dad. That was the beginning of Lawler's reign as the Southern heavyweight champion because three months later, all of a sudden out of nowhere, without any kind of reason, the promotion stopped calling that with the "junior" in there and just started calling it the Southern heavyweight title.

Besides my dad, my dad was my first idol and hero, and I always loved the Funk brothers, but Jerry Lawler was the ultimate to me because of the gimmick of being the king and he was so cocky and did great interviews, and had the greatest manager in the world, I think, Sam Bass. I always wanted to wrestle him as my first goal, and of course to win the Southern heavyweight title. That was one of the very first things that I ever wanted to do. I set a goal for myself saying that before I was 35, I wanted to become the world heavyweight champion. Back then, of course, it was just the three world champions. Like the USWA world champion and all that kind of stuff. So I wanted to do that. And then the one goal that I didn't realize at that time was such a political deal and not really on if you had brains or not, or were able to do the job, and that was being a booker. Especially in the earlier part of my career when I was getting started, I always thought, "Man, when will I be able to make these older guys think of me that I'm just not a young punk." I did grow up in the business and I have been watching and studying it for years and years. And if I can ever get the shot or even being an assistant booker, I think somebody can see that I've got what it takes. So it was to be a booker. Then in 1985, Jerry Jarrett first mentioned it to me. That was before I left to go to UWF. They had just hired Tom Renesto as the booker. Tojo Yamamoto was one of my biggest backers in that situation. And so was Jerry Lawler. Jerry Jarrett said, "If I hadn't already hired Tom Renesto, Eddie, I wanted to give you the shot at it." I was writing the program at the time for Memphis and I was writing all the stories and the trivia contests. Jerry Jarrett kind of always talked to me about the business. He knew that I knew a lot of stuff, and that's when I think it got his attention, and Eddie Marlin's attention. Eddie, of course, was like an uncle to me. Him and my dad are like brothers because of when they were tag teaming. And Eddie pushed me for the job. Jerry Jarrett made the statement if he hadn't hired Tom, he'd have given me the shot then. He said, "Whenever Tom goes, Eddie, I want you to take the booking job, if you're interested." Back then, also, the payoffs and the pay really got bad for a while there. During the winter time a lot of shows got canceled. That's when I had to pick up the phone, finally, and call Bill Watts. Ricky Morton had come up to Memphis and said, "Hey man, you need to call Bill Watts. I've been talking about you with him, and I want you down there." So that's where I went. I thought if anything, I said, "I'll never get to be a booker now because everything and all the ground work I laid in Memphis, now I had to up and leave. And it'll be a long time before they ever want to offer me a job again." When I went to UWF, in '87 was when I got the offer to take the booking job. That was the ultimate, ultimate goal. To get it and keep it and to go on from there. And then when a version—and I'll make sure I say that right because it's not like if I had won the NWA world title or the AWA world title or the WWF title back in the heyday of everything—but beating of all people, beating Jerry Lawler for the world title in Memphis last year, when everyone thinks about it or they say it's not a world title, it's just an area deal, that's fine too. But at least I knew in my heart, like it was another goal that I set that I did accomplish. Plus, beating Lawler back in 1985 for the Southern title, I got that done. I got to be a booker. I got the world title deal. And all the times I got to be a partner with my dad and hold tag titles. I did accomplish everything I wanted to. And that's another reason, besides the inner-politics and the inner-structure being what it is and being so vicious. And everything in this business, it doesn't matter if you're doing a good job or not, there's still people that don't want you to succeed. If they don't want you to do a good job, you're not because they're going to make sure that the word gets out that you're a bad seed. Reputation in this business goes a long way. In answer to the question, yes, I did accomplish everything I set out to do.

Clark: You mentioned your dad Tommy Gilbert, the Funks, and Lawler as some of the people you admire. Who are some of the other people in the business that you look up to and admire?

Gilbert: There was always very, very funny things that happened to me through the business and things that I remember. Growing up, I never got to see the Florida Championship Wrestling. Everyone else got to see. Besides the Memphis wrestling show, the only other show that I really got to watch was actually the Nashville end. I lived right in between Nashville and Memphis. So I would get to see tapes from Birmingham, Alabama, the Chattanooga end, and stuff like that. I just went on what my dad was telling me about it when he was growing up in St. Louis. He'd always talk to me about Pat O'Connor, about Buddy Rogers. And "Nature Boy" Buddy Rogers was my dad's idol growing up. When I went to Kansas City in 1979, after I had been in the business four months—I went out on my own out there, I didn't go with my dad or anything—that was a major situation for me. I always heard about Pat O'Connor's reputation of being a very stern individual and that he wasn't too nice of a person, and he was moody and all this, which most of us are in this business. I met Pat and I got to be very, very, very good friends with Bulldog Bob Brown. But Pat O'Connor became a person that, after a couple months, he would work out with

me every Thursday; the day of the matches at the Kansas City Memorial Hall. I got to work out with him and finally got to work with him. He was booking St. Louis at the time, and I got to be a tag team with him. I remember my dad talking about it, it was like, "Wow, this former NWA world champion, and he's taking his time out to help me." And then Buddy Rogers, when I was in the WWF in the latter part of '82 and '83 and so forth, when I got to be on "Roger's Corner" with Bob Backlund and Arnold Skaaland when they made the announcement that I was going to be Bob's protegee or whatever, but whenever Buddy would take time out to come back there and talk to me. I finally told him, I said, "You were my dad's idol. And now I'm getting to spend time with you and talk to you." In 1979 I got to wrestle the Brisco brothers, me and my dad in Kansas City in a big tag team tournament. I admired them. There's so many, I can't think of them right off-hand. Jackie Fargo, of course. I grew up just always admiring him. I mean, he was Memphis wrestling. He was Jerry Lawler's idol. Eddie Graham, I know it's been printed, especially in the last couple years that he was like the Godfather of wrestling bookers. He's the ultimate. He was the one that everyone said—if you read Jerry Jarrett's interview in *The Torch* or even when Bill Watts gave me my booking job, and he said, "Eddie, I wish Eddie Graham was still alive so I could send you down there." It was almost like going to school. If a person saw that you had booking potential, they sent you to stay with Eddie Graham in Florida or to work for him for six months to a year. I always admired him for all the stories I ever heard. He was a booker that, let's say up here in Philadelphia, if he was still living, and we were stuck for a finish for a match or something, if no one could really come up with a good finish, people would call Eddie Graham from a different territory and ask him if he could come up with a finish and a way out of a title match or something like that. And Jody Hamilton, the former Assassin, as a person, he was one of the bookers I ever worked for, and as a person, he was very, very good to me and a tremendous person too. I admired Dusty Rhodes. Just the fact of his mind that he's got. And say what you will about him, but the charisma about him, no one else can top that. He did have that. There was something he had or he wouldn't have stayed on top and stayed the booker that he's been for all these years. And of course, to be honest with you, I really did and I always loved every minute that I spent with him—I loved Ric Flair. He was a very, very good person.

Clark: How has the wrestling business changed for you in your opinion over the past couple years?

Gilbert: I found out very quickly many years ago that it doesn't matter what a lot of people say to you in the business, they are not your friend when they tell you they are and you cannot trust anybody as far as you can throw them. And I mean anybody, literally. It's very, very hard because there's so many times in this business that someone will tell you something and then go directly to the person they were just talking about and tell them something about you.

A lot of it has to do with the sheets and the people that read them, it's just that I've been very fortunate to gain the respect of a lot of the writers and the fans over my booking style. I've appreciated that and I've never tried to get a big head with that. There's one thing I've tried to do, even in wrestling, I've never tried to blow my own horn. I always figured that if you do that, sooner or later—there's a challenge everyday and there's a challenge every week, and every month if you're a booker—you've got to rise to that occasion. And if you don't, it could be over tomorrow. People have don't have short memories. If you're not doing well, they will sure tell you. And the position I've been put in since '87, I've really had to watch myself, watch my back. Even with some people I considered my best friends in this business.

It's changed so much that it's just not fun. It's not to where it used to be where, especially I remember in 1979 travelling with my dad and going to Kansas City, on the way to the arena I couldn't wait to get there and even start lacing up my boots to get out into the ring. I would have wrestled nine times a night and been happy. Actually I did that in Missouri back in February of '79 when I was still in high school. I traveled up there I think one Saturday night. I wrestled six different times. But that's the way they did things. They may have had twenty-five matches in one night. It was just the outlaw type promotion. I got paid \$25, but I was tickled to death. But now it's like I dread having to deal with certain people and different people. I really enjoyed being around the young guys because I figured that they haven't been messed with yet. And if there's any way at all I can help in the molding of their career, I want to. Just like Shane Douglas. I want to think and hope to think that I still have some kind of effect on him as far as his thinking. I know that I was very proud to see when I was reading his interview with you that he does appreciate people and what they do for him, like Ricky Steamboat. And that was a good person as far as learning this business and being a great babyface to learn from. Shane was laughing about it at the last TV taping. I just always wanted a chance to make him a heel because I always knew the personality that he had that no one else knew. And that was that kind of a Lex Luger type syndrome. And he could be that if I wanted him to. I wanted to give him a shot at it. Whenever he saw that's what I was doing with him, he was laughing. He told my brother, he said, "Eddie's been trying to do this with me for the past six years! And now he's getting the chance." But really, the only fun that I've really had out of it anymore... And I used to, hell, I'd stay up all night booking and try to get a month done at a time, if I was in a territory, or when I make the TV shows out. I still want to say that I can pride myself in doing the TV shows and try to do the best job I can, but it's not that great feeling and no fun

anymore like it used to be when I'd sit down and do it. And it's actually a job now instead of a happy situation. So it's just not fun. That's all. It's changed that much that it's just not fun.

Clark: What are some of the major problems that you see with the wrestling business today?

Gilbert: I don't mean this the wrong way to anybody out there at all. I don't want anybody to take this the wrong way. But there are a lot of people in power positions in our business that don't have a wrestling background. And I'm not talking about in the ring at all, I just mean they don't really know our business well enough and don't have the respect for it. And they want to treat the guys like they're a herd of cattle. In front of the guys, they'll pat you on the back and smile, as far as promoters and bookers and so forth. But once again, behind the scenes they're laughing at the guys, saying, "This guy wanted this much money. Can you believe that? Who does he think he is?" And a lot of people that are marks for different people in this business and are fans for different people in this business are now in power positions and they're calling some shots, and they really, really don't know. If they make a decision now, they don't really know why they're making that decision. I don't have anything against people like that. But I also believe that a person in that kind of position ought to have a wrestling mind. Not necessarily a wrestler, but someone that at least has been involved in the business for a few years and knows the insides and outs of it. To be by their side, to be there for them to bounce ideas off of and to let them know what's going on and get their opinion on things. As you and I discussed last night, to me it's the silliest sounding thing in this world for someone to say because someone is running "their town," that there's a war on. Hell, if we really wanted to get into picky situations. Let's just give Philadelphia for example! Hell, if anybody should get mad over someone else running Philadelphia, first it should be Vince McMahon because he was the first one here. And then if anyone else is going to get mad, it could be WCW because they came in next. So for some other people to make the statement and say it's their town and this talent can't work there and this promoter can't run; that's what I mean, this business has changed so much now that we have people that would rather put all their energy into having an argument and a fight with some other promoter than to really know what this business is about, and to try to make it a better business. And then we also have people that have been in the business for a while that see these kinds of people, these promoters now, and want to take advantage of them and try to influence them to go their way.

Anyone can take this the way they want to, but I think the biggest example you will see of this right now and in the future, is let's just sit back and watch the progress of the NWA right now. It's going to be very, very strange to watch how this all turns out because of the characters and the personalities that you have on the board. It's a different situation now. You used to have people that knew the business inside and out, and now you have people that want to pay \$500 to say that they're a member of the NWA. And that's it, so they can go around the country saying, "You know, I'm a member of the NWA." And really, all it cost them was \$500 and getting approved. Unless somebody can just prove me wrong, I believe that the way it's going right now, you and I and every Tom, Dick, or Harry out there can send \$500 in, and we'd all be members of the NWA. I want to say this too. I think everyone out there, if you do have an extra \$500 laying around, why don't you go ahead and join it, and let's really cause some disturbance and see what kind of decisions get made then. Also, the structure of WCW. There's more people that don't really know our business at all that never even gave it a second thought that are now making decisions in our business. Don't get me wrong too, when I say "our business," I'm not trying to protect it like it's someone else's or like it's mine or any of the wrestlers' business and no one else's. If someone else devotes their time and life and dedication to it, that's the kind of people I'm talking about that should be running our business and making decisions. People like a Jim Cornette, who I have the utmost respect for, a guy that I feel like I grew up with. I've seen what he's done in Smoky Mountain and I'm very, very proud of him. He's another one that has sometimes been called a rebel. But he's going against the grain and a lot of people said this and that about him. But one thing I know about Jim Cornette, he does know this business in and out, and if I had to decide whether it was the president of WCW that was going to run my territory or Jim Cornette, I would pick Jim Cornette. And I know that everyone out there is saying, "Of course, Eddie, we know that." But we really, really, really have a problem that so many people in power positions these days can be influenced by anybody. And decisions are being made that all of us just can't understand at all. It has changed it for the worse. It has changed it to where now, like myself, I've just grown weary of it and it's not even worth anymore even trying to get your opinion across and trying to make a change because it just keeps changing in the wrong direction.

Clark: That's a very sad picture, but do you see any of these problems being improved in the near future?

Gilbert: Well, they could be. They could be changed tomorrow, as far as you and I know. See, that's another thing too. This business in the past year, I have never seen so many things. It's like when you wake up each morning, you wonder what new happened. There's so many changes. It's like musical chairs sometimes.

I was very, very happy. I don't care what anyone else thinks. But you had to be there and be around the political structure in that office when Jim Ross, you would

understand why I would say I was very happy when I saw... If I had two personalities to pick from, to deal with, where it was Eric Bischoff or Jim Ross, I'd pick Eric Bischoff. Because I knew the kind of person that Jim Ross was. Either you kissed his ass or you might as well forget it. And, you know, take him out for a drink and whatever. That's a part of me, that I've never been able to do that. Either you go on your talent alone or forget it. I do understand that the politics of having to talk to people and to go out for a drink, I understand that's there. But everything just changes so much. I've been very happy. I wish everybody out there instead of using their energy of knocking things that happened in this business—when two people or three people work together would think of something else to knock because whenever they start knocking the situation of Vince McMahon making a deal with Jerry Lawler and Jerry Jarrett or with Jim Cornette, and they start knocking that, I think it's one of the greatest things that ever happened in this business because all of a sudden I remember everybody being in such a rut and reading the sheets and reading everybody's letters saying, "They're doing the same old thing." "WWF's just the same old thing." "The USWA has Jerry Lawler in the main event every week." All of a sudden, Jerry Lawler shows up. And all of a sudden, hell froze over, everyone said. But we all did get to see a change. We got to see some other stuff happening. We got to see Vince McMahon actually show up in Memphis, Tennessee to work an angle. That's what I really love. That has nothing to do with my personal feelings towards anybody. That just has to do with that I loved all of a sudden getting to read and getting to see something different. And then when Jim Cornette made hell freeze over the second time, as it was in *The Observer* that way, I thought it was even better. No matter what Jimmy had said about whether he worked for Vince or not, let's just think about for a second how much it changed the WWF. And it's going to change SMW. Like if Inoki and Baba worked a combined show, everyone over here would think that was the greatest thing in the world. If W*ING and FMW runs a show together, the people are going to think that's the greatest thing in the world. So instead of everyone saying, "Uh oh, we'd better watch out for Vince, he's going to screw Lawler and Jarrett, and he's going to screw Jim Cornette." Vince McMahon is a very, very, very intelligent person. He's very smart. He wouldn't be where he is today. Why would he even care about taking Memphis over or Knoxville? He's got to worry about getting his houses up all across this nation and making sure his ratings get up. And if that means working with Jim Cornette and Jerry Lawler and Jerry Jarrett, he's going to do it. That to me is the best thing, as far as changes. That's the greatest example in the world.

But do I think changes are coming? Yes, I do. I don't know what the changes will be. But I do know that they can exist, they can happen. I want to see WCW make some surprises and give the people some surprises. And I want to see some people shocked, to get those houses up. I don't want to see this business die, whether I'm in it or not. I've got too much love for it. I don't want to see anything happen to it. But I hope WCW though is one of those that starts making some changes and starts making some good decisions.

You've got a guy sitting out there in Amarillo, Texas right now who to me is one of the best minds in this business. He's sitting out there doing Hollywood stuff now and then, and he's got a cult following. Of course, I'm speaking of Terry Funk. And Terry has great connections with different people in this business as far as talent. And WCW needs a talent overhaul. The new talent they've brought in has just been either green guys that don't know what they're doing. To me the best personality and the best new guy they've brought in the past two or three years is Johnny B. Badd. And that's not because he's a great worker, it's because he's got great charisma. That's been about the only new character I've even given a s-t about even watching. I can see a lot of changes happening. It could happen, but until I see some of the structure change at WCW, I don't really see any good decisions being made. I'll tell you what, a lot of people knock a lot of things that Eric Bischoff does. Eric does not know our business. The only thing Eric's making decisions on right now is of course, making sure he keeps his job. And that's very hard. Getting the job is easy. Keeping it is another story. Eric right now, I know what he's going through in a sense. But he needs to look around and make some decisions whether those are the people that he trusts on making sure the ratings are up, doing good buy rates on pay-per-views, and drawing some houses. They just really need to get on the ball.

Clark: The title of the book on you being put together right now by J.D. McKay is *Wrestling's Rebel Son*. Can you explain why that title fits you or why you think it fits you?

Gilbert: J.D. McKay is the guy that's doing it. It really shocked me. It was after that Nashville convention where they had all the old-timers there. It meant a lot to me to be there. I got to see a lot of the old old-timers from the Tennessee territory. And I saw J.D. there. I gave a twenty minute speech on the old-timers, and it meant a lot to me. J.D. called me on Monday. Actually, he thought he was talking to my dad at first! He said, "I've got something I want to ask you. And I hope you're flattered, but you may not be. But I want to do a book on your life story and call it *Wrestling's Rebel Son*. Would that be alright?" I said sure because especially everybody in this business knows mostly everything about me anyway. My life's pretty much been, especially since '87, being a booker and everything, most of the time anything that's ever happened to me has been in print anyway.

I guess more or less the rebel part is that I've never taken too much s-t from people in the business. And just because a guy decided to write a book about me with that kind of title doesn't mean there's not other people out there that's the same

away I am. You know, some of us get more acknowledgement or publicity from it than others do. I guess an example would be the last time I was in Memphis. When I know that a promoter or booker is actually doing something to me personally and doing it behind my back—I've never been one of these people to say, "Okay, it's been nice working for you. I'll see you later." The last time I was in Memphis, all of a sudden whenever they got word that I might be coming up to ECW to take over the job, instead of them asking me to find out for sure everything that's going on, they booked me in the first and second matches. I was in the first match on a Monday night. I got into Memphis late from my flight. The matches start at 7:30, and it was 8:15. Well needless to say, I missed my first match. And I don't think you would have seen me out there anyway. When I got to the Coliseum I went up and sat with Jerry Jarrett. I said, "I'm sorry about not being there..." He started telling me that he wanted to have me in a six man the next week with me, Jeff Jarrett, and the Big Bossman vs Harlem Knights & Brian Christopher. I said terrific. I went downstairs and I went in Jerry Lawler's dressing room and talked to him. We talked about Terry Funk a little bit and the blizzard and everything. Then he started telling me that he wouldn't be there next Monday, he was doing something for Vince, and that I'd be in a six man tag. I said that was fine. So they talked about me doing a run-in, but Jerry Jarrett came in the room. I'm just trying to show you an example and to let everyone know what sometimes has made me go off and do strange things. But Jerry Jarrett walked in the room and had this look on his face. I could tell Jerry Lawler had the idea of me going down throwing fire to run the Harlem Knights and Brian Christopher off. When he told Jarrett that, Jerry said, "Let's wait till Saturday at TV. We'll let Eddie do the same thing there." Just that sense of something tells you that something's wrong. So I got to TV that Saturday morning. I still hadn't seen the card yet, but I still thought I was in the six man tag. That's when I found out that I was getting hit with a guitar over the head and that I'd be wrestling the Rock & Roll Phantom, Don Bass, who was a great person, with Bert Prentice in his corner. I'm not into a deal of letting a so-called faggot mess with me in the ring. I've never liked that, don't want it around me. So I went along with the thing that morning. Then when I saw the card and saw that I was in the second match, I knew I had been lied to. It had been changed to Jeff Jarrett and Bossman in a tag against the Harlem Knights. I threw the fire at Don Bass, which instead we did a thing where we hit a job guy. Then I was supposed to go right down and do interview. I went down, and I remember a lot of the sheets publicized what I said and wrote it down, and instead of doing the interview I was supposed to do, I said that a lot of strange things had been happening the day I got to TV and saw that I was in the second match this week and I saw I was booked in the first match last week. I said, "I don't think I'm asking too much, but I've been in this business fourteen years and I've worked very hard, and I don't think that I should be booked in the first and second matches." In other words, actually I quit that day on live TV. And then I walked off. Jerry Lawler was in the back, and I went back there. He was kind of just looking at me. Lawler's never been one of these people to ever confront you about anything. He waits till he does it behind your back. Which is okay, everyone has their own way of doing business. I just went up to him as I had my bag in my hand, and I said, "I just want to ask you one question. Wouldn't you feel insulted, especially here in Memphis, Tennessee, if someone put you in the first or second match? And also, would you do it?" And he said, "Yes, I would be insulted. And no, I wouldn't do it." And I said, "Fine, thank you very much" And I left. But there's been other situations like that. I've just always kind of said what was on my mind. I've always, though, tried to be as political as I can be. But when I start feeling that it's personal, and personal attacks, and when I feel a person is not man enough to tell me face to face what they want me to do or that they don't want to do an idea I've got or maybe they want to finish me up, if they haven't got the balls or aren't man enough to say that, I feel like it's just wide open then for me to do whatever I want to do. And so I've kind of got that reputation. But there are a lot of other people with that same reputation. A lot of people just handle it a different way. I've been called a rebel in that aspect. Another way of being called a rebel maybe just because of the time that you get to the building. You may stretch it a little bit. Everyone is supposed to be there an hour before, but I've been one that usually gets thirty minutes before or something like that. But there's so many different ways that I'm sure I've been tagged with that. But it's nothing I'm ashamed of. I'm very proud of that fact. I learned a lot of it from my dad. But I just never felt like letting anybody ever walk all over me or run over me. And you won't see me changing it just for a situation or for anybody else either.

Clark: Moving onto your recent stint with Tod Gordon and his ECW. What kind of business agreement did you form with Tod to come in and work for him and book Eastern Championship Wrestling?

Gilbert: Well, I had an agreement of making \$1,350 a week. It was a six month agreement, that at the end of six months we would take a look at the situation. Of course, that \$1,350 was to have me move up here. And that was with the living expenses and everything. I thought that was a fair price. We had agreed on a figure at first of \$1,000 a week, but after I got up here and saw the cost of living with an apartment, knowing what my telephone bill would be, and so forth. I mean, even my electric bill, jeez, last month it was \$175 in this apartment. All of a sudden, all this stuff went through the roof, plus eating and all that kind of stuff. I also had Kevin Lawler living with me at first, so that was buying food for him, and this and this and this, and covering his phone bills. So it was a six month deal for \$1,350 a week, unless something else came up before that time.

I'll go ahead and cover this now so you won't have to ask the question about the 49% deal. It was an agreement that came from Tod to me. It was an offer. At one time there before Terry Funk ever went on record in *The Torch* saying that when he talked to the WCW people he had mentioned my name and would be taking me with him if he went, Tod got word somehow that I might possibly be up for a position in the office in WCW at some time. And also, I don't know why a lot of people started things like this because it couldn't be farther from the truth. When Jerry Lawler first went to the WWF, I don't know why, but I started hearing stuff that I'd be going to the WWF because Lawler was there. That's how crazy the rumors are. I've never been able to figure that out. But the deal with WCW I think started worrying Tod. He never said anything to me, but I think it made him worry enough that he called me in one day and said, "I want to offer you 49%." It was more or less to make sure that I stayed. That if I got a better offer from WCW, I wouldn't journey out somewhere else. That was more or less the deal.

Clark: What were your plans for Kevin Lawler and what happened with those plans?

Gilbert: My plans were to, and I hope, to be honest with you, that Kevin proves me wrong on this, my plans were to eventually, hopefully someday, next year, that whenever if I had to pull out of here if I was going to be here that long, I wanted to eventually be able to turn this place over to somebody. I knew Paul Dangerously had hooked up with Jimmy Crockett and doing their deal down there, which I had no idea at the time that it would wind up including this. I was looking for some new young blood to be able to run the wrestling business. I hope someday that my brother is able to get the acknowledgement and recognition I think that he deserves. But a lot of people don't know Doug and have never taken the time to really talk to him. And he's been put in that bad position of being in my shadow. And I understand that, but he is a very good person as far as giving out finishes and a lot of people have respect for him. So I had Doug that I was grooming more or less to be like a finish-man, as we call it in this business. Kevin Lawler is more of a person for ideas that you'd want for angles, to dream up the angles and ideas. Also, Kevin in Memphis had gotten out and gotten some spot shows to run. And I knew his dad didn't have much time for him, and him and his brother never got along, so when I was coming up here I knew that to make this company work we needed to get some spot shows and some towns and some high schools to run. So Kevin was the first guy I thought of. When I talked to Kevin, he said, "Yeah, I'll go." There was never a money deal with him. Never. I don't care what anyone says, I will go to my grave saying this. I know this for a fact. The deal was a percentage deal. If he got out and worked and got a show, if he sold a show, we agreed to give him 10% of it. Whatever the house drew, he'd get 10% of it. I don't know, I don't want to bash him here or anything like that at all, but he wanted something for nothing and he just kind of sat around the house all day and he would never get out and he never once went out and tried to talk to anybody about getting towns. He kind of made me look bad in front of Tod because I told Tod this was the kid we wanted. And he ran up my phone bill without making business calls. Things led one to another so we had to dissolve that relationship. I just really had a lot of plans and hopes for him. He's going to learn someday that you can't get anywhere in this business with a name alone. You can't get somewhere because you're Jerry Lawler's son or Tommy Gilbert's son or Dusty Rhodes' son. You do have to have some kind of talent and you do have to produce. Even though, I've got to tell you, I was very, very shocked and in a sense, happy, that the last TV tapings I did here that the interview times I gave Kevin, he did a hell of a job. He surprised me. I never heard him do an interview like that before in the ring. But I felt bad because I thought it was too late. He didn't do his job when he got here. But I will say again, he told a lot of people that he had a money deal to come here and so forth. He never did have a money deal. That is the honest truth.

Clark: Why was the relationship between you and Tod Gordon severed and then what are your personal feelings about it not working out?

Gilbert: More or less, there was some things going on behind the scenes involving Tod Gordon, involving Jim Crockett. I have mixed feelings right now about Jim Crockett. My last relationship with him or knowing him or having dealings with him was back in the latter part of '88 and the beginning of '89. Whenever Ric Flair, Barry Windham, and myself had a little program going at WCW, it was Jimmy Crockett's idea. I think more or less it was Ric Flair's idea, but that's the one where they broke my nose and I brought Ricky Steamboat in as my partner. And I thought when Jim Crockett left that he and I were on good terms and conditions. Then during the committee deal at WCW, I was the only one on the committee that would take the time to talk to Jim Crockett. He would call the office and wanted to give suggestions, but no one would talk to him. No one on the committee would ever even give him the time of day. I remember one of the Great American Bashes for the Omni. He said, "Eddie, you ought to put War Games there." And I did. So I thought everything was fine. Still to this day I have not talked to the guy.

And so there was talk going on behind the scenes between Tod Gordon, Jim Crockett, Gary Juster is involved in there somehow—I don't know, Gary works for WCW, but he's also checking out other ventures too—and of course, a guy that I considered my best friend in the whole world, Paul Dangerously. I come to find out there was more going on to it than I knew. I had one idea about the way that I wanted this company to go. I take it now that Tod with Jim Crockett have a different

way.

Tod Gordon's only weakness I see is that he's a wrestling fan through and through and that when a person with a name like Jim Crockett takes time out to talk to him or call him, Tod's like a mark for that. He loves that. He can't believe that someone like Jimmy Crockett would take the time out to talk to him. And I feel almost like Paul's the that way too with Jim Crockett. I think right now that's Paul's weakness. He's doing a lot of leg work for Crockett right now. Paul's loyalty is 100%, or if you can be more than that, it's to Jim Crockett.

There was also a situation that when I got here, Tod told me that he had \$100,000 that he put into an account for this company to make it or break it. I told him that day that \$100,000 I know is a lot of money to all of us, but to start a wrestling company, it's nothing. It's chicken feed. You can ask Jim Cornette this. If anyone knows, Jim Cornette does and his backer does. I've been here five months and with the TV tapings and the budget, Tod's also spent a lot of money on people in his TV production that he did not have to. Then whenever he would finally tell me that money was going to this and this and this... I've never heard of a promoter that instead of buying their own plane ticket for the wrestler to send it to him, he was letting the wrestler tell him how much the plane ticket costs and to send him the money. When I found out a bunch of stuff like this, and that's what I mean about people that don't know our business. Whenever he did let me know and let me in on stuff like that, I right then would tell him, "Hey, you've got to stop that. Talk to him, find out when they want to fly in. Contact your travel agent, let's get the ticket for him. And you'll be saving some money." The production company here sent him a rundown of all the costs, because I wanted to see it. They were charging him for the two nights of TV tapings, it was like \$20,000 in production. Just one example, on the sheet there was a place where it said "executive assistants," who were getting \$400 a piece. And there was two of them. I looked at Tod, I said, "Tod, there are no executive assistants. Who is that?" It's just a strange deal. There was money that went for things that shouldn't have. But also, too, \$100,000, to start a wrestling company, to have it going, to bring talent in that you want, you better have a lot of money and ready to go for a while, if you're going to start a wrestling company.

But I had to sever it because of a situation with Crockett coming in and Paul coming in. I knew that there were a lot of decisions made that I had no idea or know nothing about at all. I've got to say this too. Tod has been the best promoter I've ever worked for. He did come through with the money that he promised me. He paid me that. He left me alone. I got to do the TV shows I wanted to do.

I've read a couple letters in different things. I remember Carlie Gill or whatever her name is. A lot of people have made accusations about the TV show and about me putting myself on there in what capacity. In a situation like that, I look at what Jim Cornette said, and he's exactly right. I always knew I'd be here. I wasn't going anywhere. If I had talent that I thought was better than that could do it and knew what I was looking for, I sure would have them doing it. Actually, I was in the process of trying to work Hunter Q. Robbins, who I think somewhere in this business deserves the position as a manager because he's got such a good way of talking like a snob. He's got a great gimmick and I really like him. I was looking to try to bring him in there. I wanted Bellomo to start doing some stuff like co-host a show sometimes, like every three or four weeks, doing some funny stuff.

But Tod let me do whatever I wanted to do with the show, he paid me the money, he was very good to me. But when all this outside interference came in, I knew it was time to go. And I wanted to do it the right way. I didn't want to up and say, "Screw all of you, you stabbed me in the back." I just wanted to end it the right way. It's just the direction that I did not want to go. I don't think it's the right direction, but then again I'm not part of it anymore. So I really hope that Tod takes the blinders off and he watches what's happening, and is very, very careful of who he's listening to. He also listens to too many people and he believes every, everything that he's told. And he's from a business. But until you're in the wrestling business, you're naive to all that kind of stuff because you will believe everything. You'll believe everything until someone burns you. I will be very happy when the day comes and I know that Tod Gordon is not believing everything that he's told and hears. And I hope and I pray that Jim Crockett is doing this for the right reason and that it's not to make a front man out of Tod Gordon with money and for the Northeast. But from what I've heard and what I saw Saturday night (9/18 ECW show) at the building, I think my hoping is just down the drain. For somebody to come up that really hadn't run but one show, and it was in Ft. Hood, Texas. It was not a TV taping, and we've heard so much hubbalo about a TV taping coming about, and if they can't even take care and run their own show, they've got to come up and take a show that I booked and I was running, and come in and try to take it over Saturday night like they did. That doesn't say much for them. And to me, Saturday night I felt like a guy that had coached a team to the playoffs through the Super Bowl, was relieved of my duty or couldn't go to the game for the big one, and then another coach steps in and says, "Okay, I'm running the show." That's more or less what happened Saturday night with Paul making his speech. I've got to say this too. I've probably never been so hurt in my life till Saturday night when I heard about the speech Paul made to everybody. I never thought he'd go publicly for any situation between me and him after all that he and I've been through business wise. But he did and it's really had an impact on my friendship with him. And it will in the future. It's just a very, very delicate situation. And that's all I'll say right now.

Clark: Financially speaking with ECW, did any of the shows you worked on make money?

Gilbert: I know for sure that the last show, not this past Saturday's, he made a little profit. Like I said, he's got some expenditures that he shouldn't have. As far as drawing wise, there's some good figures. He's got some sold shows now coming up in October he'll be making money off of and this past Saturday night's show was a good moneymaker for him in all aspects—gimmicks wise, house wise. Believe this or not, I've never seen a promoter like this. Sometimes Tod actually wants to overpay the boys, the local guys. When he loses money, it's not necessarily because the house is bad. It's because of the budget he's got, which he could cut down on.

Clark: You're familiar with Joel Goodhart, and he ran into some problems with bringing in too much talent and paying them too much. Do you see that as a problem here in this situation?

Gilbert: Not like it was with Joel. At least with Tod, we'd sit down and say, okay, let's only have this many outside guys coming in. Like a Stan Hansen, Abdullah the Butcher, Terry Funk, and so forth. And let's not have it from first match to last match with outside talent that's asking for so much money. There's no way. I mean, you can try to make all the fans happy. But then again, that's where I try to make a difference by having a scaffold match with—even though the Dark Patriot's an outside guy, Doug wasn't making like what a Stan Hansen or Abdullah was. Or having a loser gets ten lashes match with Bellomo and Chris Michaels. All those kind of gimmick matches like that made up, I thought, for any outside talent coming in. But he is not in the same boat. I think Joel got into the fact of trying to impress everyone by the talent he could bring in, and oh my gosh, just went totally over the line with money. There's been so many things talked about with Joel and what he's done to people, but Bob (ECW ring announcer) and Lex Artese got taken by Joel Goodhart for money. Just like Tod Gordon did. Tod got taken for a bunch of money by Joel. But that's where that wrestling fan syndrome comes in again too, though. That's where you can be taken, if you're a fan and you don't know this business. So it's almost like a con man.

But Bob and Lex, great people that I've gotten to meet here. That's another thing too. I've gotten to meet and make friends with a lot of very good people here. Like the director Matt Radico, Jay Sulli (ECW commentator), Kathy Fitzpatrick, Bob and Lex, Tod and his family, and everyone's just been tremendous friends to me.

Clark: I just wanted to clarify something. The show this past Saturday, it was a show that you had booked, but was run by Paul E. Dangerously and Jim Crockett?

Gilbert: Well, yeah. Yeah.

Clark: How did that make you feel? Do you think it was acceptable or appropriate that that was allowed to happen?

Gilbert: No, I don't think so. The other thing is, I think that the worst thing about all of this is the way that it was handled. I had no idea that Jim Crockett was even going to be here. Paul and I, the last time we had talked before Saturday, was Tuesday when I was in Lexington, Tennessee. And Paul never mentioned a thing about Crockett being here for a meeting or anything. Tod and I really had a good, amicable way of splitting this up. It was a very, very good situation. He said that he still wanted me to run his show. Actually, he wanted me to be in the back to run the show. During the week when he talked to me in Lexington, I said no because I just didn't want to it. I said I'll send the finishes with Doug. You and him can go over them, and then he can carry them out. Tod said great. So Saturday morning I called Doug. He was over at the Comfort Inn. I gave Doug all the finishes. And then Tod came over and met with Doug. In the meantime, I had called Paul's answering machine and left a message by saying that Doug's got all the finishes. Well, Paul, the first thing he did was call my brother and say, "Eddie's got the finishes. You mean Eddie's carrying out the finishes tonight." And then Doug called me and told me that. Paul never, ever called Saturday and told me nothing about anything. So Paul thought that he was running the show, totally, with his finishes. Then I found out that Ted Petty (Cheetah Kid) was on the card, which is a Paul Dangerously guy. And Paul was expecting trouble. Paul was scared, because he had his little group with him. His henchmen. If he didn't feel guilty or if he wasn't guilty, he should have been by himself. But he wasn't. But when he took over and gave his speech the other night... He also went up to Doug and said, "Oh, Jim Crockett's in charge." And Doug said, "Whaaaaat?" It wound up Doug still gave out most of the finishes, and the ones he didn't give out were the ones he just didn't even want to. He got so disgusted with everything too, like most of the people were there, I think. During the situation where I got on the microphone and thanked the people and thanked the promotion and I told them to support the deal, Paul E. from what I have heard went off and threw a tantrum about, "What in the hell's he doing on the microphone? Tod, come here!" He looked at Doug and said, "Doug, did you know Eddie was going to get on the microphone?" And that's of course what blew my brother's temper out of control. I'm not going to make a big deal out of this either. Everything in the business wise that I've done for Paul and tried to teach him, and he just totally stepped all over that. Like, if a person could take my heart out Saturday night and stomp on it on the floor, it was Paul. The worst thing he said to Doug, though, was, "This is Jim Crockett's show!" And I talked to Tod yesterday too, and I've heard this, so I know it for a fact that this happened. Tod put his hand up on Paul's shoulder and said, "I beg your pardon." And Paul said, "This is Jim Crockett's show." And Tod says, "No, it's

not." So there's a situation there already. It's like a powder cake, to me, about to explode. They tried to run the show, they tried to take over and everything, but it didn't quite go the way they wanted it to. But I'm going to sit back like everybody and yourself and watch to see what happens next. I was just totally shocked, surprised, everything that you could possibly be when somebody really shocks you, I was that way Saturday night.

Clark: Now about the barbed wire baseball bat match situation that you had booked. Was what they said at the show about the State Athletic Commission restricting them from using the barbed wire the legitimate reason why there was no barbed wire involved in that advertised and promised match?

Gilbert: I don't know what they said, but I'll tell you what happened. They waited till the match was two matches out before they said, "Where's the barbed wire?" I tell you, they were too worried about having their big summit meeting with Dennis Coralluzzo, Jim Crockett, Paul E., and Tod Gordon, instead of first of all seeing what all they had to have for that night. Then they tried to send out a girl that works for Tod, at the last minute to try and find barbed wire. She said when she walked in the hardware store, they said, "What? Barbed what?" So that's the way it went. No responsibility was taken Saturday. Their minds were somewhere else. They were trying to discuss something else and they were trying to book the world for the next three years, I guess. That's sarcastic there, but I guess their minds were not on the barbed wire baseball bat match.

Clark: From your experience of working in Philadelphia with ECW and Tod Gordon, do you feel that the organization can develop and grow into a full-fledged territory, but with also considering their new direction and their new booker and their influences?

Gilbert: I felt it could. See, I don't know now. There's so many factors involved now. When you get other promoters when you don't already have a base—if you already had a base and Jim Crockett had already had a territory going, and then you want to work together, that's a different story. That's kind of like what I was talking about with Vince and Corlette and with Lawler and Jarrett. But before you actually get it going and all of a sudden you have someone else coming in now trying to call the shots... I mean, Crockett has sold this deal to Tod by saying, "We're going to get Baltimore, we're going to get Philadelphia, we're going to Washington, we're going to do this, that." When "we" really haven't graduated out of the first grade yet here. That's where Tod is like just a fan for that.

I think it could, but once again I'll go back to the direction of, it will take money and it's going to take time. If he has the money and wants to put into it and if he has the time, it will work, eventually. But with so many people involved, it's like too many chiefs and not enough Indians. And that's what you have here right now.

Clark: For you personally, were you looking at this experience with ECW to be your chance to finally prove your booking talent and ability in this business?

Gilbert: No, I think I've already done that. I felt like I did in Alabama. I went in when it was drawing \$1,200 a week in Dothan, Alabama. A month later we had it averaging \$8,000 to \$10,000 a week and changed the name of it from Continental Championship Wrestling—this was in 1988—I changed it to Continental Wrestling Federation. I rechanged everything. I tore the background down where Gordon Solie used to stand in front of to do the announcing. David Wood said we couldn't afford a new background. So I had Tony Anthony and Tom Prichard, I said, "You all get in a fight, and just kind of, knock it down." So we ended up changing the outlook. They had three different titles there. I turned them in and had one, the Continental Wrestling Federation heavyweight title. They used to have an Alabama title, a Southeastern title, and an Alabama state title. I feel that with UWF and especially with Continental, Continental to me will always be very special because I took it from just a dead territory, everyone said that it was just totally dead. It was not worth anything, the Fullers had killed it. When they left, they sold it to David Woods. They got a sucker to buy it. He didn't know anything about wrestling. And he brought me down there. That's when I brought Paul in as my manager. I changed Pez Whatley to Willy B. Hurt. I brought Shane Douglas in. Sid Vicious, he was working as Lord Humungous. I switched him babyface, put him and Shane together as a tag team. That was when we did this angle. You've got to remember the black population of Alabama. We did an angle there where Paul and I beat up Pez Whatley's son. We had a wrestling fan on television come over the barricade with a knife open to cut us. But we started drawing money. We did an angle with Austin Idol in Dothan. Every city in that territory, a different babyface was over more than another babyface. And that's who we would have on there. It wasn't like the same program, the same matches in every city. I changed them up. That was the most fun I've ever had. If there was ever a question about whether I could do it or not, good or bad, I felt like I had done it then. I also knew from that point on that I had to rise to the occasion any other time I had the job.

I got to finally carry out one of dreams of being the booker in Memphis. I never had gotten to do that until 1990. They had never brought in Dick Murdoch before. Even though he may not mean a lot to a lot of people out there, but Memphis had never brought in the talent that we did for the USWA world heavyweight title tournament back in '90. Up until this last house they were talking about a card they

had a month ago where they drew a hell of a house down there. A lot of people forgot this, and they were talking about Lawler and Hennig from '88 or whatever, but in 1990 we did a twenty something thousand dollar house. I had Terry Funk there, Austin Idol, Dick Murdoch, Dick Slater, Steve Keirn, there was a long list of talent that I brought in for it. And we almost sold the thing out for the tournament. So that was a good feeling too, and that was the territory where you can't just do stuff to please yourself, or because you know what's right or wrong. And like in the Memphis territory, you have to please nine different people. You have Christine Jarrett. You have Jerry Jarrett. You have Jerry Lawler. You have Jeff Jarrett. You have Eddie Marlin. You have Guy Coffey in Memphis, Tennessee, who's a promoter. You have Buddy Wayne, who's a promoter. Frank Morrell, who's the referee that rides with Jeff Jarrett to the matches, you've got his opinion in there all the time. You've got Paul Neighbors, who is the cousin to Jerry Jarrett's first cousin. But what it is, all their opinions, they're always sitting and they're discussing whether you're good or bad or what you did was right or wrong. After a while, it just gets like, "Please leave me alone." When I finally got the job with Global to do the ESPN and all that stuff, I had a good time. But then again too, we had stale talent. I always liked it like in Alabama. You made chicken salad out of chicken s-t. I always would rather have a territory that the names there are not really that good or either local talent, and maybe just bring in a couple names, but build my own characters, give them their own names. And then you know you've done something when you draw. If you bring in an established star and you draw a house, what have you done? Nothing. I am the kind of person, if we run a show and sellout the Spectrum here, as an example, or Veterans Stadium with some un-Godly card, of course I'd be happy. But if I knew that I did it by some kind of angle or somebody that no one ever thought would have drawn in a different gimmick or a different name, then I know I've done something and it would be a great big celebration. The other way is, well, that's the way it's supposed to go. You bring in an established star, you sellout. That's just the way it's supposed to happen. There's nothing new to it.

When I came up here, what I did was another Alabama. But this was different in the fact that we didn't have a territory and we didn't have the towns to get out and run. But then again we ran right into a wall here because when Kevin wasn't getting out and doing his job, well I looked at Tod, and Tod wasn't trying to find anybody to do that job. Really, I was just stuck in a Catch-22 situation. I was just stuck with trying to do the best and most entertaining TV's I could do. When I first started here, we were trying to get six one hour shows out of those two nights of tapings. After the second taping, I had to stretch that to eight and nine shows for Tod and his budget. I had to put all my efforts and energy just into doing the TV tapings and the big show that we did, and the TV. What I knew I had to do though, and the goal for myself I set was just making sure that whatever I did was different than anybody else. I think I've established myself for the job. I've just got to make sure I don't hurt my reputation.

Clark: Did you want to do the same thing basically like you did in Alabama where you built the promotion around the younger wrestlers in the area?

Gilbert: Yes, yes. I took a guy named Alan Martin, who was just a jobber on Atlanta TV, and all of a sudden I gave him a gimmick. First I started him out. He was the jack of all trades, we kind of called him. He became a heel referee. Then he became Mr. Alan Martin. He wore an old looking suit and top hat and a briefcase in his hand. And he was managing the WWF world champion now, Yokozuna, who was one of the Samoans with Sika. He'd be managing him and come out with a big cigar saying his uncle died and left him a lot of money. And he was such a Southern talking guy. Him and Shane, and just like Paul E. Dangerously, Paul was a young guy then. He was a really young guy. But I gave Paul responsibilities back then to do. Sid Vicious was a young guy in the business then. He had only been working a year or two. So I gave all those guys, like "Go do it. If you can do it, let's draw some money." So they did.

Clark: Who are some of the guys from ECW who you feel from looking at, have the potential to make it in this business?

Gilbert: Well, one of them is already down in SMW now. I think Chris Candito's got a lot of talent. I've never really been able to publicly say that before and never had the reason to, but Chris is a great talent and I'm glad he's finally getting the recognition he deserves. Chris Michaels, I had to change his name to Sir Richard Michaels here because we had Chris Candito as one of the Blondes. That was the reason why for the name change. What Chris has is that he has got such charisma. What caught my eye about Chris when I first saw him work and he was putting somebody over for me at TV, he's like a blend between a Buddy Landel and somebody else. He can bump his ass off. He takes crazy bumps. But he's got a style when he walks in the ring. It's like my dad used to say, Buddy Rogers had this style of walking around the ring. Nick Bockwinkel had that style. Ric Flair's got that style. Chris Michaels has that style of just walking around the ring. He looks like he's somebody. To me, he represents somebody that could do good in a tag team position. Johnny Hotbody is a hard worker. Johnny just needs to quit getting down on himself and being a baby in the dressing room. But other than that, he is a hard worker and he takes great bumps. Believe this or not, a guy that's been in our business for a long, long time, that a lot of people hated especially back in the early '80s, was Salvatore Bellomo. I think Bellomo for WCW or WWF, if you put him in

a comedy role to act goofy like he does, I think he can fill that role. I think he can be the kids' person. He's a good-hearted guy. God, he kills me, the comedian he is, and he doesn't even know it. J.T. Smith, definitely. J.T. is a very, very good worker and he also takes incredible bumps, as we all know. He volunteered to take that one off that box up there when him and Doug did that thing, and then the scaffold match. He would literally just kill himself for this business. And not say a word. And he is one of the nicest people that I've ever worked with or met in this business. And he would give you just his whole body and life for this business.

Clark: How would you describe your philosophy on producing the TV that you did with ECW, and its purpose?

Gilbert: It's changed, no doubt. My philosophy on making TV's has changed totally from 1987 to now because of the changes made in everyone else's TV. I used to be totally serious on TV. I mean everybody. My whole theory was that to draw money, everyone had to be serious at all times. So if the angle was serious, the interviews were serious. We had to be serious, period. This time I got to be able to go over that line that we have in this business of where you're supposed to be and how you're supposed to do TV's. I got to totally just blow that line and do it the way I wanted to, and change it up. I had never, ever seen anything like what we wound up doing. Like making fun of Salvatore Bellomo doing an interview and putting up on the screen "What did he say?" underneath. A lot of the stuff we did was just the comedy in general. I love watching David Letterman. I've learned so much from watching him. I think he's just ahead of his time. That's where I got the one scene we did that day where I said I'd go out and find the first person I ran into, and he would co-host the show. So I go out and then I'd find my buddy John Gilliam from Lexington. And I love *Saturday Night Live*. That's my other favorite show. So I got to thinking, why can't we have some skits, do some comedy, but also be very, very serious on our angles? You know, if there's got to be blood, there's got to be blood. If there's got to be a bump off the top of the building to the floor, do that. We can be serious when we're supposed to be, do serious interviews when we're supposed to, but also kind of be light-hearted enough to where this day in time with everybody with a remote control in their hands and they're able to tune sixty or seventy some stations in, that while we're on let's make sure that they don't turn away and that we give them something different where they say, "Wow, I don't want to miss this stuff. There's no telling what they may do." I had never, ever thought of trying to interrupt a match to have a special announcement, a special report, like I did with Abdullah the Butcher's specials that we aired. Like during those two tag matches that were on, we just in the middle of them, out of nowhere, just for a minute interrupted and did an announcement like a special report news reporter. I had never seen anybody do that. Anything that was different and knew that no one else had ever done it, especially with a wrestling show, I wanted to do it. Because one thing for sure I knew, especially the way this business is, that either I was going to get torn apart by the critics who say, "We can't believe he's doing this," or they would find it entertaining. Right now, my philosophy on television is just to be as entertaining as I can be in every aspect—in a serious angle, serious interviews. Also like you were talking about last night, Bobby Heenan and Gorilla Monsoon. Also that other factor in there of you can call it comedy, you can call it skits, but that light-hearted part where families don't mind when their kids are watching, that it is funny to them, and that you have a Bellomo character, and you have a guy on there who thinks he's the king of Philadelphia and goes downtown like an idiot wearing a crown and gets a Burger King crown put on his head by the announcer. That's my philosophy and theories now. Now two years from now, if I'm asked this and even if I'm in politics or running for office, my philosophy may change then because it's just according to where we're at and how the business is doing.

Clark: What are some of the creative things that you were looking forward to doing on your television?

Gilbert: Well, I wanted to very, very much work in different co-hosts to help. I wanted to have a new segment that I was going to approach you about. About doing a two to three minute segment. And I thought this would break new ground. That's another thing I tried to do. I've always tried to balance it out in this business with my sheet interviews sometimes where I've gone over the line where I knew that some of the older guys in this business that I have a whole lot of respect for, I didn't want them to say, "Gilbert's killing our business." First off, I don't think there is any way I could kill this business. It's doing a good enough job by itself. But I wanted to be able to again go over the line and kind of bring an inside objective to this business. Like Will McDonough does on NFL Live on Sundays before the NFL game. And everyone of the insiders on all these NFL shows—that's my greatest example to everyone—I wanted you to be behind a desk and I wanted you to give the insights on what was going on in the business. Like money deals. If someone new signed a contract with WCW, if you knew what the money figure was, give it. If you heard someone was jumping from one area to another. If Terry Funk was doing something in FMW in Japan. And also mainly, and if there was an angle done that we did that was a very serious angle or something that happened, or a decision coming down from our commissioner Tod Gordon, I wanted to have your opinion, and sometimes be a heavy opinion. I got to where I was sitting here and gazing up at the ceiling, and just trying to think, "Okay, since I've already went over the boundaries with the skits I'm doing, what else can I do that will totally blow the show away?" And now with

the hardcores, who I was promoting to anyway, now what can make them go, "Wow, I can't believe it. We're seeing this on TV." You know, "He's acknowledging John Clark of a wrestling sheet." Or, "He's saying Wade Keller's name and he's saying Dave Meltzer's name." And also at the same time saying Bill Apter's. That adds a totally different ring to it.

I don't care who's knocked me. Everyone has their own opinions. I've said that about me or anyone else in this business. I always want to think that somehow or another when people look back at the beginnings of the wrestling sheets and how a person like Wade Keller started doing interviews and like yourself right now doing them— and you're doing some great interviews—who were the first people that were not scared and that were brave enough, let's say in this business, and not afraid of being just totally blackballed—which I'm sure they've all tried to do to me sooner or later—is who actually gave an interview that said what was going on inside the business and who broke the ground for that? And I hope that someday when we're older that people can look back and say that Eddie Gilbert was one of the people that did that with my first interview with Wade Keller in 1990 about the goings ons with WCW and how I was on that committee. I've always had the utmost respect for all the sheets and all the sheet writers no matter what their opinion of me was or whatever the readers write in. That's everyone's privilege and honor. But I think it's been the best thing for the business. And I hope someday, and this has really been on my mind a lot too, I think we will see a wrestling magazine or two come out with that format. And you may be the one to do it, who knows. I mean, we don't know that right now. I hope someday to have a hand in that because I see our business going in that direction, especially with WCW with the people that are running the company down there. See, they're more open-minded to that than say, Vince McMahon would be. I mean, if they were to hear something like that, they wouldn't want to kill you like Vince and his crew would. I always wanted to give everybody a shot at this and I didn't want anybody to ever be shocked at anything I ever did and I wanted to make sure that I was fair to everybody and I wanted to make sure that if someone was going to do something different, I wanted to be the first one to do it. That gave me my kick. No one ever had to say anything about it. I just would want to know that I did it.

Clark: About the newsletters, what kind of an effect do you think they have had on the wrestling industry, if any?

Gilbert: I think it's been so good. I'm just giving you an example here of a person, let's say like Terry Funk. Of course, who knows who all talks to Terry and who he talks to about what's going on inside the business. But he's sitting out there and he gets to keep up on the insides of our business by actually not having to really count on having to talk to too many people and running up his long distance bill. Just like I don't. Because we get the sheets. What's so great too about the sheets is that they're all in competition. So everyone wants to get, like on a news leak, what story comes out first. All of you want to get it first, which is great. Meltzer and Keller, it's according to when they go to printing, is when you know you get the story. That just makes it for the best information we know we're going to get now. And it keeps getting better and better and better. Just an example too and I don't mean anything by this, because I do have respect for Ole Anderson. Whatever he does or says, I don't know about. But it does make people like him think again whenever they go on a hotline and say that he challenges all the sheet writers. Then whenever it gets printed and someone takes him up on it, and then it becomes a lawsuit supposedly. It changes our whole outlook on this. Let's say if somebody fails a piss test and they try to cover it up. If somehow word gets out about that, you know, "So and so failed it, but they covered it up. And he's still working for them." Well, they'd be scared to death now for that to get out like that. The sheets have helped us in so many different ways. The money deals, because they always find out. Who knows where Meltzer gets his scoops on that? I know Jim Cornette said it before and I'll say it too. Like one time when I was there getting my money deal and offer, he knew it that afternoon before I even went in there. And Cornette said the same thing. They've really changed it in such a good way. I like it because everybody in this country and around the world knows what's going on now better. And you can keep up with it. And I love it. I can't wait to get my sheets every week. If you looked ten years ago at, if you call them sheets, but back then they were fan club letters or whatever. They were mostly just newspaper clippings reprinted in the sheets, results, and all that. And maybe now and then an interview that had nothing to do with the kind of interviews you're doing. They were about, "What do you think of Joe Blow this week? Are you going to kill them?" It was just like a TV interview. You never talked about the inside of the business. What's so good too is that people now understand it's not as easy as what everyone thinks about being a booker and being in charge. It's not just about coming up with ideas, about booking a good TV show. It's about dealing with what I said about Eric Bischoff. It's easy to get the job sometimes, it's hard to keep it. Because a lot of people are out to get you. And they are, I don't care what anybody says. And you've got to deal with the owner, the promoter, the boys. When you go in and sit down and talk to two guys when they're about to do a match and you need to get somebody over, it's harder than what everybody out there can ever, ever imagine. And then you've got everybody's opinion too about what you do. So it's harder. But also, the sheets are better for bookers because they keep you on your toes too. Now when you do an angle, you can get a sheet and see what everyone thinks of it.

Clark: How is it these days for you making a living on the independent circuit, and has the situation changed in recent years?

Gilbert: It's good as far as the money and all that, but of course, it's just according to how many there are and so forth. It's not real, real easy. I mean, the money is good. The last year or so I've noticed that there's been more. To me, it seems. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm the wrong person to ask that to because, whether this is good or bad, I've just always been picky about who I work for. And it's never been about money. I mean, it is about money. I have my price. But most of the time when I work an independent show, it's according to who it is and who it's for. Because I really enjoy doing my overseas stuff for Otto Wanz and then going to Austria and Germany, and then Japan. Hopefully, I'll be doing some stuff with John Arezzi this year and next year before I call it quits.

Clark: How do you feel the politics that exist in the wrestling business have effected you and your career in the industry?

Gilbert: What exactly do you mean as far as politics?

Clark: Well, such as a situation where you would go on John Arezzi's radio show and present your true feelings about things, like with the situation with Paul E. Dangerously and WCW a while back.

Gilbert: Okay, okay, I gotcha you. You gave me an example of when I put myself on the line for my friend. If you had to find a reason for J.D. McKay's title of a book concerning me, that would probably be the greatest example right there of anything. When it happened to Paul, that was the worst fiasco I've ever seen in my life. It did not happen the way that it was told. I've already went on-record and said all that stuff.

I was out of the picture. I had been pretty much just put on the old grill, and fried and grilled. There are a whole lot of people at WCW that didn't want me there, didn't want me in. And most of them are the older regime. I think most of the people know what I'm talking about. They just don't want any young people coming along and they want to keep us out as long as they can. That's fine and I understood that. And that's the reason why when it happened to Paul, I was upset at the time and I was very angry when I heard about it. I wanted to do something like that day when Paul told me that he got suspended. I was going on Goodhart's show. I was doing it from Dallas on a Saturday morning. I told Paul, "I've got to say something on Goodhart's show about this. It's not right." He said, "Just be careful on whatever you say. Just remember they're going to have attorneys listening." A caller called in and asked something about the fiasco with Paul E., and I went ahead and I made just a small kind of statement. I just said, "It wasn't right." It was just a little five minute deal. Okay, I let it go. And me and Paul talked that week and it still was bothering me. I was like, "No, this is not right. And somebody needs to blow them right out of the water." I was tired of what had happened to me in 1990 there with the inside politics. It wasn't anymore of what a person knew or the job they could do. And that was very obvious in the summer of 1989 as WCW did the best business yet to date. That was when the whole committee had left and gone on vacation, and I was the sole person, the only one going to the office that week when TBS sent down the thing that we had to change all the Bash cards. We were doing \$80,000, \$100,000, \$120,000 business at house shows that summer. And especially with my Terry Funk-Ric Flair angle. And when I got screwed over on that deal, I knew then... I thought, "What is this business about?" That's when I started feeling that it wasn't fun anymore. Then when the thing happened with Paul, John Arezzi's producer called me at home in Atlanta on that Sunday and he asked if I'd want to go on the air and say something. And I said, "Yes, I would." When I went on the air and said what I did and I watched the way I worded it, but it's the way I felt. I still feel that way today. I wouldn't change a thing I said. It did cost me a lot. I knew as long as Jim Herd was in charge I would never be thought of as coming back to WCW. Which is understandable, and I didn't really care. I didn't work for somebody that didn't have any respect or care about anything. To be honest with you, that was influenced by somebody that took him out to drink after everyday at work. And that's not the way to me to run this wrestling business.

And I guess the politics in that aspect really effected me because I stood up and said what I felt and stood up for a friend. And in this business, I remember starting in it, a couple times things happened and I went to bat for people and different things. My dad told me then, he said, "Son, you're going to learn that you may stick up for a lot of people in this business, but when the chips are down, they're not going to stick up for you and they're not going to do for you what you're doing for them." I always remember that, kept that in my head, but when I did that for Paul, and that was really the only reason, it was for Paul. He was my friend and I didn't like seeing him done the way he was, because of something he supposedly told me. Which he didn't. It was somebody else inside the office. Just because Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler hated him, he got suspended.

When Meltzer reprinted the transcript from it, when Wade Keller reprinted it, when Steve Beverly said what he did and then called Jerry Jarrett, I never thought I'd ever work Memphis again, to be honest with you. But yet six months later I was in Memphis. That shows you though that anything's possible and never say never. But yes, the politics, it effected me in different ways and it has effected me. But it has not ever changed me. When someone asks me a question or something, usually I never

look at it like, "Okay, how will this effect me? What will people think of me?" I just usually say what I feel and if someone's getting screwed around, if I don't like it, I'm going to tell you.

Clark: What relationships that you've had in the business have been effected by the politics in the business?

Gilbert: When a guy in this business says that they were hurt, I mean it sounds kind of strange. You're in the wrestling business and when you say I was hurt over something, it sounds kind of, I don't know. It's just whenever you grow up and you carry people in the highest esteem and have more respect for them than anybody else, and you would do anything for them, and then later you get older and you get involved in the business. Like Jerry Lawler and I had a love/hate relationship. When we're working together and like each other, it's great. And when we're not, we don't even talk. When I'm out there we don't even talk by phone. Then I may go back and work a year later, and then we're friends again. I don't know. I would have done anything for him, ever. Just because of what he was to me and how I held him growing up, like as my idol and hero. I think he's taken advantage of that a few times.

I think that Ric Flair expects to be everybody's idol. But that is fine, he has worked for that. I will never take that away from him. But I remember the days in the UWF before it became UWF, when it was Mid South, when he would come in to defend the NWA world title, I was the guy that he rode with. I was the guy that travelled with him, stayed over together in hotels, and went to bars together. Then when the UWF got bought by Jim Crockett, and I had got the booking job for Bill Watts, I thought Ric Flair would be the first guy to come to me and say congratulations. You know, "Way to go. I'm glad to hear that you've done so good or you were able to." The first time I saw him, I went up to him to shake hands, and he was just like, "How you doing?" And I thought something's wrong. And still yet, I was being so naive enough to think that everything's still okay, Ric just must be in a bad mood. Then when the committee deal came about in '89, I had no idea of the politics involved. I thought when we went in that room and the whole committee was in there, that our idea is that we come up with the best ideas, we give them to everyone in that room. And our purpose is to come up with the best ideas that would draw, that would get good ratings. I didn't realize that if I came up with ideas I thought were great and would draw money, that Ric Flair or people like him—there were other people in there too that did the same thing. It just bothered me because I just always thought so much of him, that he would actually someday have a hand in me getting bumped off the committee.

I did the same thing for Ric Flair I did for Paul. I walked out of the meeting in Baltimore with him the day after the Great American Bash where he wrestled Terry Funk. The next morning he told them all to cram it up their ass. But he was making his power-play for the booking job. And I agreed with what he said though, because they treated us all bad that night and the next day. And we sold out the arena, hell, before we even got there in Baltimore. We had a great buy rate and everything, and still yet, Jim Herd was picking it apart, nitpicking. And Flair just blew his top. He got up and he walked out of the room. I started closing my briefcase. I remember Jim Barnett saying, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Well, he's right. And I'm going back to my room." I go out of the door and Jim Herd's trying to catch up with Flair to talk to him. And I yelled at Ric, I said, "Champ, I'm with you." He said, "God bless you, Eddie." But eventually Kevin Sullivan came out and got me, and I went back into the meeting. Then three weeks later when Flair got the booking job, at that point in time they said he was the head of the committee. One week later, and this was the worst part of it all, instead of him telling me or calling me to tell me that he wanted to replace me or didn't want me on the committee any longer, he had Janie Engle, his secretary, call my house. I had gone to get a physical because we were going to New York or something, before I went to the office. I got back to the house at around nine. I was going to change into my suit and go to the office. And Missy yells down to me, "Janie just called from the office. She says that when she got there, she found a note from Ric Flair that said you do not have to come in today." Well, that just pissed me off. I got in my car and went down there, went up to the twelfth floor. And when I walked in, Ole Anderson and Jim Cornette were sitting in the lobby. I knew then what had happened. I knew where I had been replaced. People have always tried to play me and Cornette against each other, but I never let that take any kind of toll, though. I never hold anything against him that happened like that. Ric Flair was in with Jim Herd. I went back there to Janie, and I said, "Do you have that message?" She said yeah and she handed it to me. And I kept it for a long, long time. It was just a pink piece of paper for messages. And it says, "Call Eddie Gilbert and tell him he does not have to come in. Ric Flair." I walked into Jody Hamilton, who I have the utmost respect for, and I said, "Jody, can you believe this? This guy that everyone thinks is God in our business does not have the balls to call me, Eddie Gilbert, little Eddie, to tell me that he doesn't want me here." You won't believe the thoughts I had in my mind. I wanted to bust into the room where Herd and Flair was, just to tell him exactly what I thought of him. But I didn't. I finally went on back to the house. It was a very, very tense situation. He never, ever told me why. He hardly even talked to me after that. He never acknowledged the fact that he didn't want me on the committee. That was politics. Having a relationship that I thought was a great friendship, that turned out to be a nothing. I found out that whatever is good for him at the time was all he wanted. But I just want to make sure I say that everyone out there has their different opinions of Ric Flair. I understand

that totally, but I've just been through some different experiences with him. And I know the person behind the myth, let's say, and the way that he thinks and what he's really after. But it's not any different than the scenario that just happened with me here. When power and greed get involved, no one has any friends, no one has any family. They will do whatever it takes to get that power. So I've learned the hard way.

Clark: How did politics play a part in your marriage with Missy Hyatt, with you both being in the business?

Gilbert: Very rough. There was a situation at WCW, especially with Missy, when Ric Flair starting pushing Woman. Well, they left Missy then at home totally. At the time I was still on the committee, and that was another one of my downfalls with him. I've said some things and did some things too because I didn't like the way that it was being handled with her. He wasn't telling her anything, didn't tell her that he didn't have anything for her. He was just not talking, leaving her at home, or whatever. Then I had to deal with that all by myself. And she couldn't understand why I wasn't doing something for her. I thought, "Jeez, I'm having a hard enough time for myself. There's politics involving me." We went through things of her staying in bed all day, make sure I say by herself, with the shades pulled down and depression setting in because Nancy was getting pushed and she wasn't on TV. That's all she wanted to talk about. That was a very rough time for me because at the same time I was going through the situation of being knocked off the committee, I also had to deal with my wife at home who was upset but who was not trying to do anything for herself. And then when Jim Ross got her back on TV, well, all her loyalty went totally to him.

Oh gosh, if I ever, ever, and I doubt if I will, but if I ever get married ever again, believe me, it won't be somebody in the wrestling business and it will probably be someone from Lexington, Tennessee. That was another part of my life. I had a high school sweetheart, and we planned on getting married after we had been together five years. She was two years younger than me. In 1982, actually she gave me the ultimatum, I had to make a choice between her and the business. My dad was booking Puerto Rico and he wanted to bring me down there. Of course, from there I went to the WWF. But she made the ultimatum to me, either the business or her. And I picked the business. Of course (sarcastically). She was a home girl and everything like that.

Clark: I read an interview with Missy where she said the problems she had was that you kept choosing the business over her. For a while you might have chosen the love of wrestling over a woman or whatever...

Gilbert: Oh, I did. I did. Yeah, I did totally. One thing about wrestling is the reason why I loved it so much, my whole life's been dedicated to this business. I mean totally. A lot of people don't understand this or realize this, when I was four years old and I was in kindergarten or preschool and stuff, they would come around and ask everybody what they wanted to be. And at that age back then everyone would be saying policeman, fireman. I was saying wrestler. That's because my dad was a wrestler. This business has been in my head since I was a baby and I've just grown up with it. And it's going to be very hard to take it away from me or me give it up, I know. Not as hard now as it would have been. But for me to be in a booking position or a committee deal and all that, I do give a hundred percent to that. Wrestling was like, not a hobby, but just a job. Missy, or a girl in a relationship with me, was able to do other things and have other hobbies. And my whole life was like, if I had spare time I was working on wrestling. I'd be watching tapes and I'd be watching movies. I'm a movie buff. I got a lot of my ideas from watching movies, like different scenarios and funny things. But she could never understand that, and that was a hard situation for her. She made the statement that when the business was bad on me, I was a bad person; when it was good, I was a good person. I don't think that it's necessarily that way, but I was dedicated to it. Yeah.

Clark: Are you at a different point in your life right now in regards to the importance of the business to you and its effects on you?

Gilbert: Yeah, I think so. I think I've grown up a lot. I think I've been through a lot for a 32 year old guy, as far as personal relationships and as far as the relationship with this business for the things I've been through in the business, and things that's happened while I've been into it. Wrestling is a fantasy world. A lot of people don't understand that or think about it that way. They take it for what it is. It is a fantasy world. That's like Paul in a situation. An example of Paul is that he takes it too far. I'm going to leave it at that. It's like James Bond to him, like everything's a secret and everyone's out to get each other and there's more to it than what it seems on the surface. But I think I've grown up a lot and I think I've learned to take it for what it is. It is a business. It is a job. But I do enjoy doing the ideas and everything. But I've also grown up enough to know that now it's time to start really analyzing my life and career, and try to decide really what I want to do.